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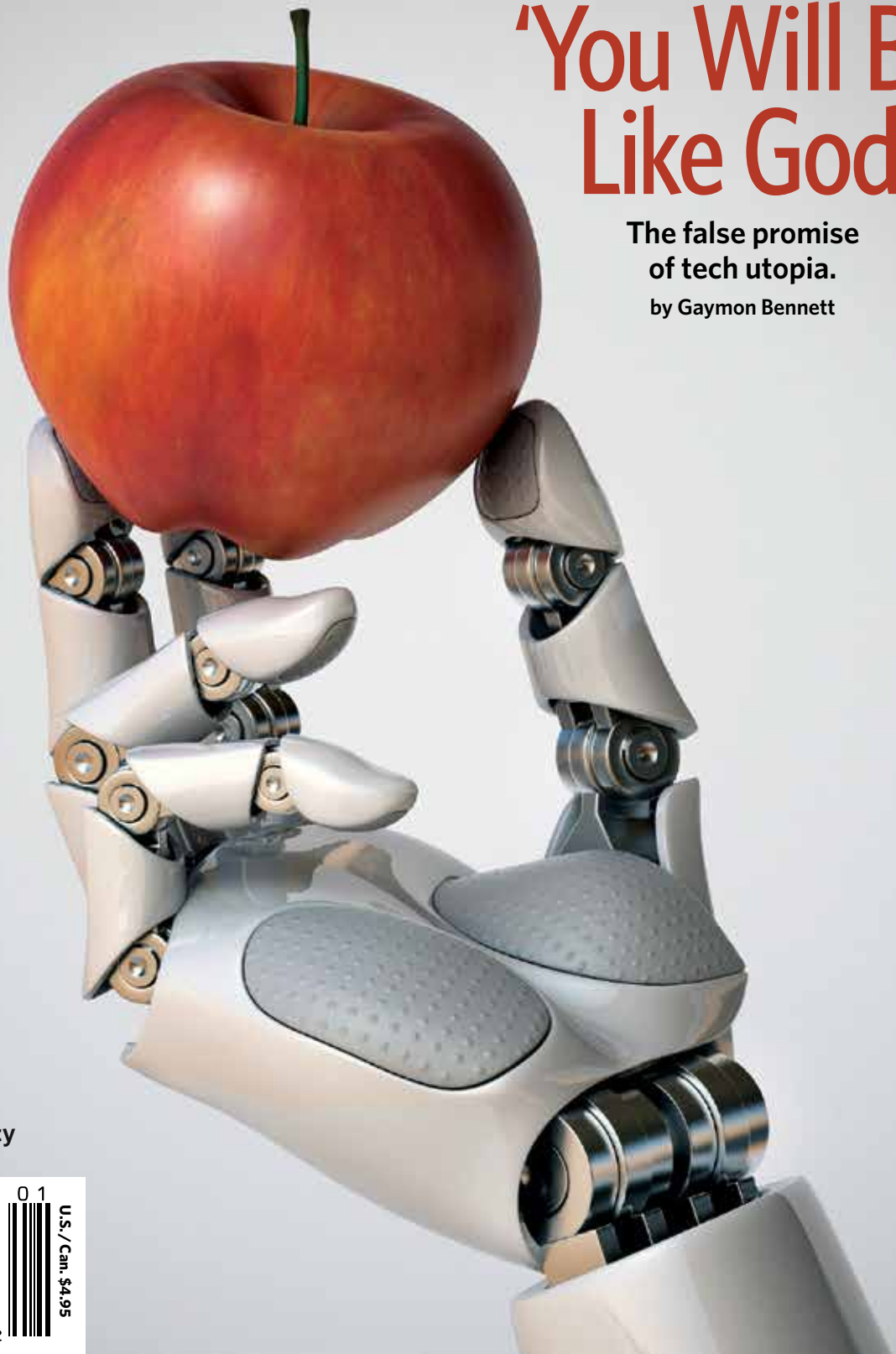
Faith in Action for Social Justice

'You Will Be Like God'

The false promise of tech utopia.

by Gaymon Bennett



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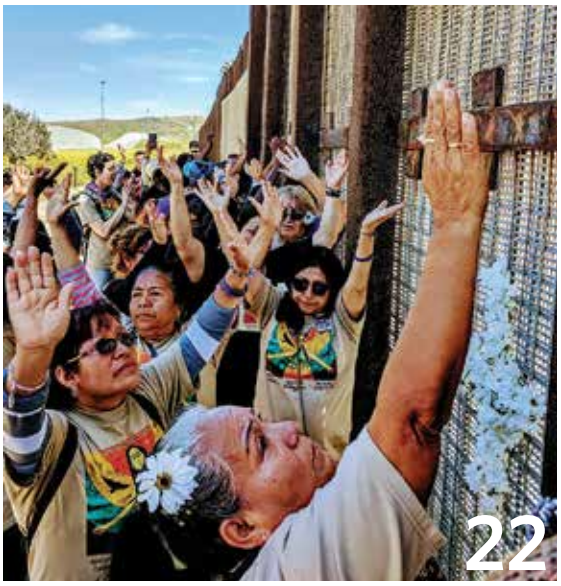

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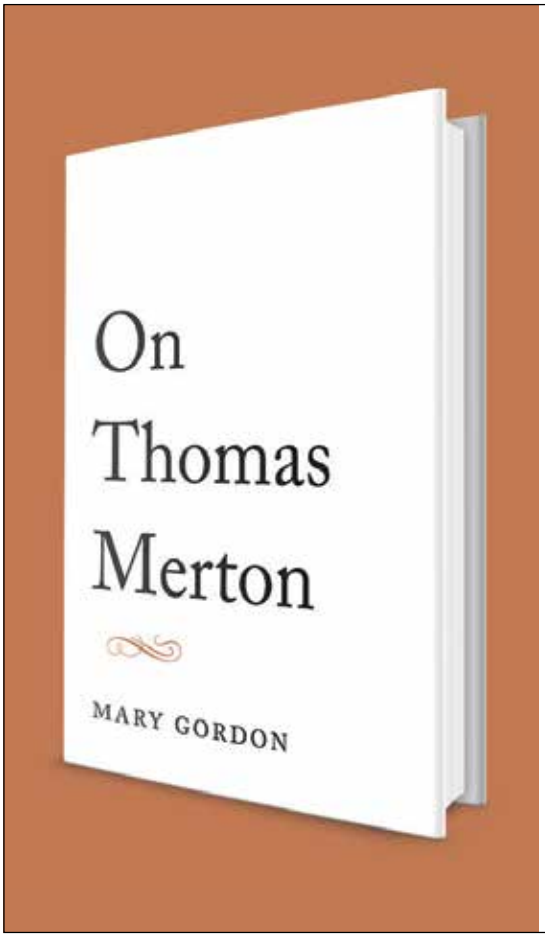

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ON THOMAS MERTON

Mary Gordon

From the best-selling novelist and memoirist: a deeply personal view of her discovery of Thomas Merton through his writings.

"Ardent, heartfelt, headlong: with these words Mary Gordon lovingly penetrates to the core of Thomas Merton's ongoing importance, but the same words apply to her achievement. Gordon is the ideal reader of Merton, matching his intelligence, irony, and authentic feel for the world beyond words. Her book brings his books back to life, and belongs with them from now on."

—James Carroll, author of *Constantine's Sword* and *The Cloister*

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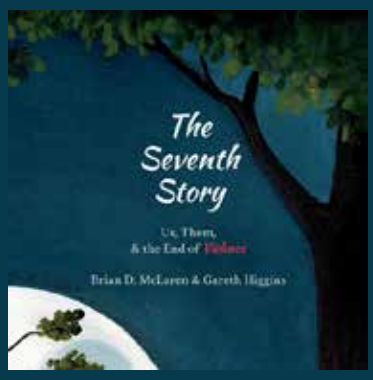

A fable and reflection on Us, Them, and the End of Violence

Two new books, one for children (with exquisite illustrations by acclaimed artist Heather Harris), the other for grown-ups, both offering a powerful and provocative message about transcending fear and aggression, and tools for moving into a better story.

Only available directly from www.theseventhstory.com

"WE LIVE AS if the connections provided by digital technologies are vital," writes Gaymon Bennett in the cover story, "and indeed we have made them so."

Guilty as charged. Hang around the Sojourners office long enough and you'll hear stories about how we used to keep a list of our subscribers in a shoebox and write articles on typewriters. But those days are done: Today our office hosts a congregation of laptops, tablets, screens, cameras, and smartphones that we need to access databases, send messages, and update our website. When a network upgrade happens to knock out the Wi-Fi, we all go home because, well, how could we work?

What does it mean to live this way? It's a question *Sojourners* has asked before and will keep asking. In our July-August 2001 issue, we asked David Batstone and Bill Wylie-Kellermann to help us think "biblically, theologically, and critically about technology." Batstone argued that, for example, the internet is "a communication tool," that, like anything, could be harnessed for good or evil. Thus, as Batstone argued, people of faith should "build movements to democratize the application of technology." But Wylie-Kellermann was more skeptical. Channeling theologian Walter Wink, he named technology as one of the "fallen principalities and powers" of this age that cannot be harnessed. "The technological system itself already has a sort of 'logic' or 'intelligence' by which it moves," he wrote, "And human control over it is already mitigated."

In this issue, Bennett takes a careful look at the twisted logic—and theology—that brought us Facebook, iPhones, 2-day shipping, Alexa, and 1,700,000,000 search results in .48 seconds: "Innovation is always good, and more is always better. Create powerful technologies, improve humanity and the planet, and make piles of money. This is the secularized spirituality of Big Tech at work, buffering it against any ability to contemplate its own potential evil," writes Bennett.

We hope Bennett's essay makes you think—and not just about the evil "out there" in Silicon Valley, but also about shadows and contradictions that lurk "in here," in our own lives. It's important soul work as we celebrate the mystery of Incarnation and prepare to enter 2019 ready to bless all whose lives are linked with ours—digitally and otherwise. ■

Letters

Big Brother Bias

It is disappointing to read "Under Ortega, Nicaragua Explodes," by Eric L. Olson (November 2018), because of its one-sided nature. To rely on "an expert on U.S. policy on Latin America ... [who] lives in Washington D.C." rather than on the voices of fellow Nicaraguan Christians embroiled in the current situation is uncharacteristic of *Sojourners*. Is it "big brother's" spin on events that we take at face value, or do we seek to hear from sisters and brothers from the underside? Given the history of multiple CIA-instigated coups in Latin America, doesn't the claim by some Nicaraguans that the recent troubles are the result of a CIA-sponsored coup attempt—taking advantage of initially nonviolent protests of unpopular policy changes—deserve a fair hearing? One would hope that *Sojourners* would join with Nicaraguan Christians in prayer and accompaniment rather than side with U.S. policy.

Doug Wingeier
Asheville, North Carolina

Laughing Through Tears

In his November 2018 "H'rumphs" column, Ed Spivey Jr. so perfectly captured and condensed the searing pain of our current political universe that I must thank him. It feels good to be understood. Thank you for your outrage, mercifully disguised as humor, and the wonderful way you make us laugh through our tears. I am glad you exist, are paying attention, and are at *Sojourners*.

Brigid Geroux
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

> Thank you for your outrage, mercifully disguised as humor. I am glad you exist.

Silent Epidemic

I just finished reading Jim Wallis' "100 Sermons" in the July 2018 issue of *Sojourners*. Thanks to you and your colleagues for calling all of us to live a life of faith, social justice, and love. Did you know that men with disabilities experience sexual violence at higher rates than women without disabilities? And women with disabilities experience sexual violence at higher rates than men with disabilities? This is a silent epidemic in our midst. The voices of those with disabilities must be heard and their experiences recognized. May we work together to ensure they are not forgotten and that our efforts toward prevention and care include all who experience sexual violence.

Shelly Pfaff
Pierre, South Dakota

Past and Present Sins

Jim Wallis' "Which Jesus Do We Serve?" in the June 2018 issue of *Sojourners* was exceptional and timely. The atrocities that Christians have committed, including slavery and genocide, are part of our history. Our sins make us uncomfortable and angry because we don't know how to deal with them. The result is an angry society that is warlike. If we acknowledge and confront our sins, we might attempt to make amends for the damage we did and in many ways are still doing. We could, then, be more engaged in promoting peace instead of waging war.

Jake Terpstra
Grand Rapids, Michigan

"I can't believe ...!" *Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.*

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BY JIM WALLIS

'We Shall Remain United'

JUST DAYS BEFORE the midterm elections, the Sojourners community reacted with shock, mourning, and fear at the horrific and murderous attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Eleven congregants were killed while observing the Sabbath in the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in U.S. history.

That this evil act of anti-Semitic terrorism should take place here in the United States is deeply shocking. Yet both U.S. and world history teach us that the poison of anti-Semitism is very real and has deadly consequences. Anti-Semitism is one of the oldest and most persistent forms of bigotry alive in the world today, and Christians—who believe all human beings are created in the image of God—have a duty to name anti-Semitism and confront it at every turn, particularly given the shameful complicity of so many Christians in the Holocaust and other oppression and killing of Jewish people.

When the president proudly called himself "nationalist," the white supremacists and anti-Semites felt emboldened.

This hate crime capped off a horrific week of violence inspired by white supremacist ideology, in which racist and conspiracy theories were openly promulgated on the campaign trail by Donald Trump and amplified by prominent voices in right-wing media and dark web spaces. The attempted murder of critics of the Trump administration by mailing pipe bombs, the killing of two African Americans—Vickie Lee Jones and Maurice Stallard—in a grocery store after a failed attack on a black church, and the massacre of Jews in their synagogue—all were carried out by white supremacist nationalists, who are the greatest terrorist threats in America today.

In his closing election messages, Trump was unashamedly using a political strategy of fear and hate. The violence we have seen cannot be disconnected from the bigoted and hateful words of presidential political rhetoric. When the president proudly called himself "nationalist," amid such hate and violence, the white nationalists, supremacists, and anti-Semites felt supported and emboldened.

Our hearts were broken as we reached out in love, care, and solidarity to our Jewish friends, colleagues, fellow believers, and citizens. Our faith was offended by these assaults that directly contradict the biblical commands to love and protect our neighbors, and especially to focus on "the other" who is often under attack. Our conscience was seared by the hateful politics that likely will lead to more violence. Words matter, and hateful words lead to violence. At a time of moral crisis, we as people of many faiths will live and love side by side.

DAYS AFTER THE synagogue massacre, a group of interfaith leaders gathered to offer words of consolation, solidarity, and hope and issue a call for prayer. At such a politically volatile time, prayer is not perfunctory but rather one of the most powerful ways to apply our spiritual resources to a national and political emergency.

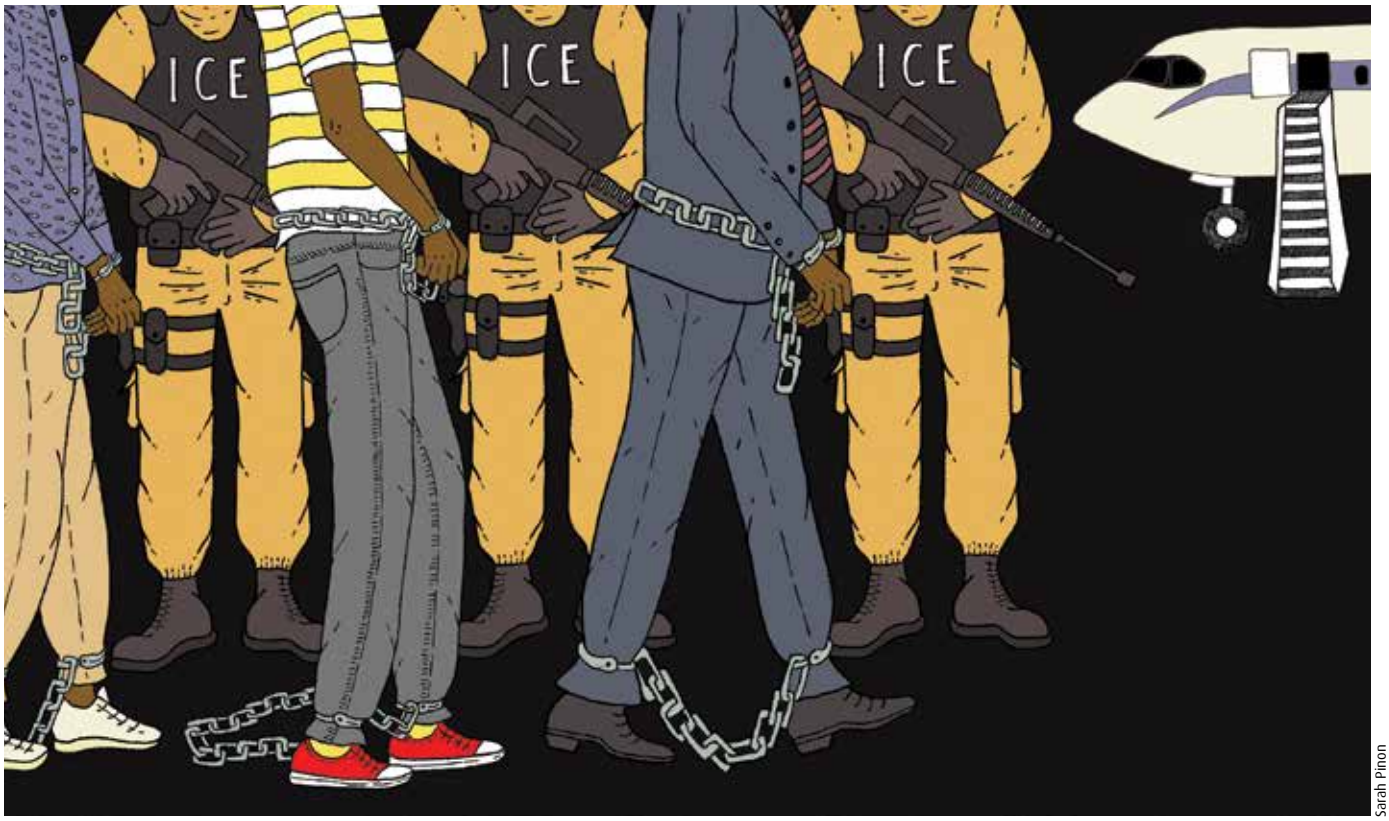
Rev. James Forbes, who convened us at the gathering, called us to pray for "the transformation of our nation." Rabbi David Saperstein finished the reading that was interrupted at the Tree of Life synagogue, he said, as a response to the "explosion of hate groups" and "degradation of civil discourse." He added, "We must never forget that so long as one group can be targeted with hate, no group is safe. ... What has been so extraordinary is how religious communities have arisen after such tragedies have occurred. ... We shall remain united."

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner encouraged the connection of faith to our civic duty. "We find our nation today [going] back to oppression, back in a dark place, with hatred and violence on the rise," she said. "And still we rise, because we are answering the call to refocus our eyes to see even more clearly the image of God in every person."

Rev. Rob Schenck shared a most powerful testimony. "As an evangelical minister," he said, "I have every reason to be hopeful, even at times like these. ... And yet in these days I find myself ... filled with regret for having spent 35 years of my career engaging in the kind of inflammatory, vitriolic, contemptuous language that we hear spewed so much today from the highest echelons in our society. ... I never dreamed that the words that I used with such conviction would be turned into the most unspeakable and murderous acts by some of my listeners. But I watched in horror as they were. And so I will carry that as a terrible burden on my conscience for the rest of my life."

Schenck concluded with a "admonition, a warning to our president, to our elected and appointed officials, even to my fellow religious leaders—the day has now come when your inflammatory, denunciatory, disrespectful, and contemptuous language has been converted into the murder of innocent human beings." Civic and religious leaders, he said, must take "moral ownership of language and attitudes toward others. May God help us to repent and to ... treat one another with the same respect and acceptance and affirmation that we all long for." ■

***Jim Wallis** is editor-in-chief of* Sojourners *magazine.*



Sarah Pinon

By Jeania Ree V. Moore

Stopping Slave Planes

Four centuries after slave ships landed in Virginia, planes deport African immigrants back to slavery.

THE YEAR 2019 marks 400 years since a boat carrying "20 and odd" enslaved Africans landed at Point Comfort in colonial Virginia. To commemorate this and other historic 1619 events, Virginia will host "American Evolution," a yearlong celebration in which these events have been transmuted into national values. The arrival of enslaved Africans on American shores has become "diversity."

Yet, last summer a West African immigrant was deported back to Africa to face slavery, in a transatlantic reversal of journeys that underscores the persistence of immorality in this involuntary passage.

On Aug. 22, Seyni Diagne, a 64-year-old immigrant battling kidney cancer and hepatitis B, was deported from Dulles International Airport in Virginia to his home country of Mauritania after 17 years in the U.S. There he faces enslavement through forced labor. Mauritania has one of the highest rates of slavery in the world, impacting more than 40,000 black Mauritanians.

The day following Diagne's deportation was the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition. The Commonwealth of Virginia chose to mark it by recognizing the first Africans in English North America.

> The abolition of slavery is regarded as the moral apex of U.S. history.

Efforts in the U.S. to commemorate transatlantic slavery, those who endured it, and its eventual end ring hollow against the backdrop of the Trump administration's racist immigration and refugee policies and state governments' compliance. Celebrating "diversity" while turning dutifully as a cog in the system that seeks to root it out is absurd. Like noisy gongs or clanging cymbals, such efforts strike a discordant note, deaf to slavery's history and reality.

Slavery's end is sacrosanct in the constellation of American civil religion. It is broadly understood as having confirmed the identity of the nation, justifying and sanctifying America's leadership in the free world. The abolition of slavery is regarded as the moral apex of U.S. history, yet it is largely absent from official public discourse addressing contemporary realities of freedom and freedom of movement, including modern slavery, forced displacement, immigration, and global migration.

This absence speaks volumes. For centuries, Africans were kidnapped and brought to the U.S. in chains and faced a life of enslavement. Today, Africans come to the U.S. seeking refuge from such fates—and are being sent back.

Black Mauritanians sought safety in the U.S. from their government, which not only persecuted them but also rescinded their citizenship and refused to issue travel documents, rendering them stateless. While Mauritanians, including Diagne, found relative refuge and community in Columbus, Ohio, that safety is ending. At least 80 Mauritanian immigrants were deported in 2018.

For several reasons, Diagne's deportation is a signal. It highlights the callousness of a U.S. immigration system that routinely ignores human health and human rights, unashamedly displaying the "moral turpitude" that it claims resides in the migrants it polices. It reveals the connections between migration policy and racism, inside and outside of the U.S. It illuminates the continuing reality of slavery and black enslavement.

For those of us who count ourselves activists, Diagne's deportation, and the failure of airport activists who sought to prevent it, also illustrate sobering realities in the struggle for justice. Five activists went to Dulles on the night of Diagne's deportation to plead with passengers on his plane, airport employees, officials, and others to stop his flight. Their inability to do so contrasts with what happened a month prior in Sweden when university student Elin Ersson stopped the deportation of an Afghan asylum seeker by refusing to take her seat on a plane until he was removed. Diagne's deportation pinpoints the power of one in building moral community, and the fragility of such community. It raises questions about the failure and disintegration of solidarity and the responsibility we all bear. ■

***Jeania Ree V. Moore** works in faith-based social justice advocacy as the director of civil and human rights with the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church.*

By Justin Lee

Honor the Dead, Fight for the Living

Matthew Shepard has been laid to rest—but hate crimes continue.

I WAS A COLLEGE student in a Southern town—newly out, wrestling with what this meant for my Christian faith, and dealing with daily homophobia on my campus—when I heard that a young man in Wyoming, close to my age, had been brutally murdered for being gay. His name was Matthew Shepard.

The details were horrific. He'd been fiercely beaten, tied to a fence, and left there in the cold for 18 hours. I pictured the scene over and over in my mind, unable to shake it. I couldn't stop looking at the photos of him in happier times, wondering if we would have been friends—or if it could happen to me. His murder, though far away, made me feel lonelier and more afraid to be myself than I already was.

In October, 20 years after Matthew Shepard was murdered, his remains were laid to rest at the Washington National Cathedral. For many LGBTQ+ people, the interment brought some sense of closure.

Shepard's death and the horrific murder of James Byrd Jr. are often linked because of Obama-era hate crime legislation named for both. Byrd was an African-American man killed for his race the same year Shepard was killed for his orientation. Byrd was beaten by white supremacists in Texas who urinated on him, tied his ankles to the back of a truck, and dragged him—still alive—for miles.

I intended to write about the cultural impact of their deaths, but one day after Shepard's interment, another tragedy: A man with four semi-automatic weapons opened fire in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, killing 11 people. Once again, the motive was apparently hate—this time, anti-Semitic. Once again, the impact created ripples of fear far beyond the victims and their families.

It is vital that we pay attention to these stories. But when they come day after day, I confess, I grow weary with the weight of them. I want to look away. Not because I don't care, but because I care so much and feel so powerless.

Psychologists call this "learned helplessness," and it can be toxic. We come to believe that there is no hope, so we stop

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From the Archives

January 1979

Real Conversion

THE REAL WAY to be biblical and to respect biblical authority is to do what biblical people did and in the way that they did it. It is not to quote biblical sources or uncover the deep and secret meanings of biblical texts. The authority of words, even inspired words, must somehow be based in the de facto authority of accomplished deeds, redeemed peoples, and living bodies. In other words, it has to have worked somewhere, sometime, with someone, or it is an idealized abstraction. I find that a great many people who put themselves under the cope of religion are, in fact, people who enjoy ideology and abstraction as an escape from real commitment and real conversion.

A salvation history is the beginning and the basis of Christian and Jewish theology. Historical events gave authority to the words and allowed them to be written down with inspiration. Moses did not give endless teachings about Abrahamic faith; he led people out of slavery, through a desert, and into a whole new place. He created a new people who could begin to hear God. ...

Jesus himself did not find his authority in words or traditions; he taught with living authority "and not like the scribes" (Mark 1:22). With the apostles and disciples, he again created a new people, a spiritual family. And he did this most simply and profoundly by telling this family about their Father and the full nature of his love. ■

***Richard Rohr, OFM,** was pastor of the New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati when this article appeared.*

trying to change things.

Here's my message: Don't give in. Change may be slow, but it is possible. Some of it may come through political and legal change, but some of it must come through cultural change. And that is exactly why we must pay attention to these stories, *especially* when they are about people different from us.

When we are overwhelmed, we gravitate to caring about the stories that impact us personally. I think about the murder of Matthew Shepard or the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando—where I live—more often than I think about James Byrd's murder or other hate crimes, because these affect my own sense of safety as a gay man.

But I need to fight that instinct. I have privilege and power as a white man. Some who would not listen to others may listen to me when I address dangerous dehumanization. And every dent we make in our cultural prejudices is a blow against the kind of culture that incubates extremists.

To honor the dead is important. But even more important is to use our lives to care for those who are impacted by these tragedies—to hear their pain, give them our shoulder, and use our privilege, wherever we have it, to stand up to prejudice wherever we encounter it.

Don't lose hope. This is what we are called for. ■

***Justin Lee,** author of* Talking Across the Divide*, lives in Orlando, Fla. Find him at GeekyJustin.com.*

By Stephen Zunes

Khashoggi, Yemen, Lockheed Martin

Neither Democrats nor Republicans plan to hold Saudi Arabia accountable. What about us?

DESPITE THE manifold horrors inflicted by the Saudi regime over the years, it was not until the grisly murder of a well-connected exiled journalist in early October that public attention has finally been given to the monarchy's savagery.

U.S.-educated Jamal Khashoggi was perhaps Saudi Arabia's most prominent journalist, having served as editor-in-chief for the Saudi *Al-Watan* daily newspaper and as general manager and editor-in-chief of Al-Arab News Channel. A moderately conservative Islamist who became increasingly liberal in his later years, Khashoggi's writings emphasized the need for freedom of expression in the Arab world. Such rights, if exercised in his home country, could threaten the hold on power by the corrupt U.S.-backed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who had paradoxically been lauded in the U.S. media as a reformer.

In recent decades, the Saudi regime has executed hundreds of their domestic opponents. What made Khashoggi's murder different is that, as a *Washington Post* columnist living in the D.C. area, he was well-known and respected among leading journalists, members of Congress, influential pundits, and others. Khashoggi's prominence, along with the sensitivity regarding the protected status of journalists and the brutal nature of his killing, resulted in his death receiving the widespread attention denied to so many of the regime's other victims.

It is worth noting that the incident that led to Khashoggi's initial banning by the Saudis was not his criticisms of Saudi leadership (which came later), but his critique in 2016 of President-elect Trump's Middle East policies. The Saudi regime immediately prohibited Khashoggi from writing in newspapers, making appearances on broadcasts, and attending conferences, resulting in his exile.

While U.S. administrations of both parties have a sordid record of supporting the Saudi family dictatorship, previous presidents have at least pretended to show concern for human rights. By contrast, Trump's explicit insistence that arms deals are more important than taking a stand against the regime's atrocities shocked even hardened critics of U.S. foreign policy.

One factor in Trump's support for Saudi Arabia may be related to wanting Saudi support for possible military action against Iran, even though the concerns Washington has raised about Iran—human rights abuses, lack of democracy, support for extremist

groups, and military intervention in other countries—are at least as true about the Saudis.

The U.S. has most directly supported Saudi crimes by providing weapons, delivery systems, strategic coordination, refueling, and other logistics for Saudi Arabia's air war in Yemen, which is responsible for more than 16,000 civilian deaths and injuries in three years (the majority from airstrikes), a massive cholera outbreak, and famine impacting as many as 14 million people. In March, a bipartisan effort in the U.S. Senate to suspend arms transfers to the Saudis failed when 10 Democrats crossed the aisle to join a majority of Republicans in supporting Trump's call to block the bill. A missile that struck a school bus in northern Yemen in August, killing dozens of children, was manufactured by U.S. defense contractor Lockheed Martin, CNN reported.

Yemen's civil war resulted from a U.S.-backed Saudi plan that insisted Yemen's authoritarian president Ali Abdullah Saleh (ousted in a largely nonviolent uprising during the Arab Spring) be replaced by Saleh's vice president, Gen. Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, instead of by the provisional government representing the majority opposition, as pro-democracy activists demanded, and followed by free elections. Houthi rebels, representing the country's Zaidi Shia minority, then seized most of the country. Though the Houthis are guilty of their own atrocities and opposed by most Yemenis, U.S. and Saudi claims that the Houthis are a proxy for Iran are greatly exaggerated.

Whether Khashoggi's murder will finally change U.S. policy or will be another Saudi atrocity that fails to alter decades of U.S. support will depend largely on pressure from the U.S. public. This may not be easy. The Democratic Party's 2016 platform rejected calls for conditioning U.S. support for the Saudi regime and allied monarchies.

As with successful campaigns in recent decades that forced an end to U.S. support for repressive regimes in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Southern Africa, it is up to proponents of human rights to mobilize to force a change in policy. ■

Stephen Zunes, *author of* Civil Resistance Against Coups, *teaches at the University of San Francisco.*

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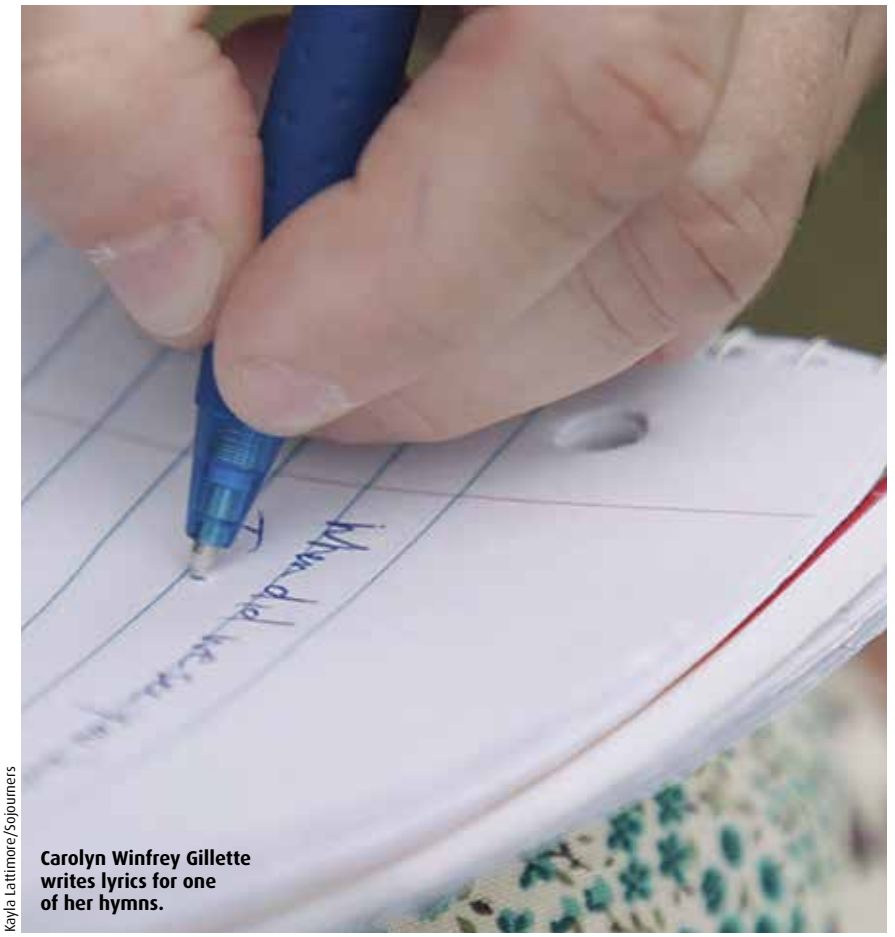


Kayla Lattimore/Sojourners

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette writes lyrics for one of her hymns.

Not the Hymns of Ages Past

"When we speak words, maybe it's more of an intellectual thing. I think when we sing, we sing from our hearts," pastor and hymn-writer Carolyn Winfrey Gillette told Sojourners. "It engages a different part of who we are." Over the past 20 years, Gillette has written more than 400 hymns, many of which pair biblical stories with contemporary issues such as mass shootings, the separation of immigrant families, and health-care access. For more about Gillette and the hymns she's written, visit **sojo.net/video.**

QUOTED

"The old African proverb is, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' But who will the village have to raise if the children are continually taken from us?"

— Jamar A. Boyd II
on white apathy to violence against black people
sojo.net/boyd

VIEWS

Collaborate, Cooperate, Coordinate

"There are numerous reports, studies, and surveys that detail the negative impact global climate change poses, specifically to communities of color, low-income neighborhoods, and rural areas," writes Gerard L. Durley. Here are four ways you can reduce that impact:

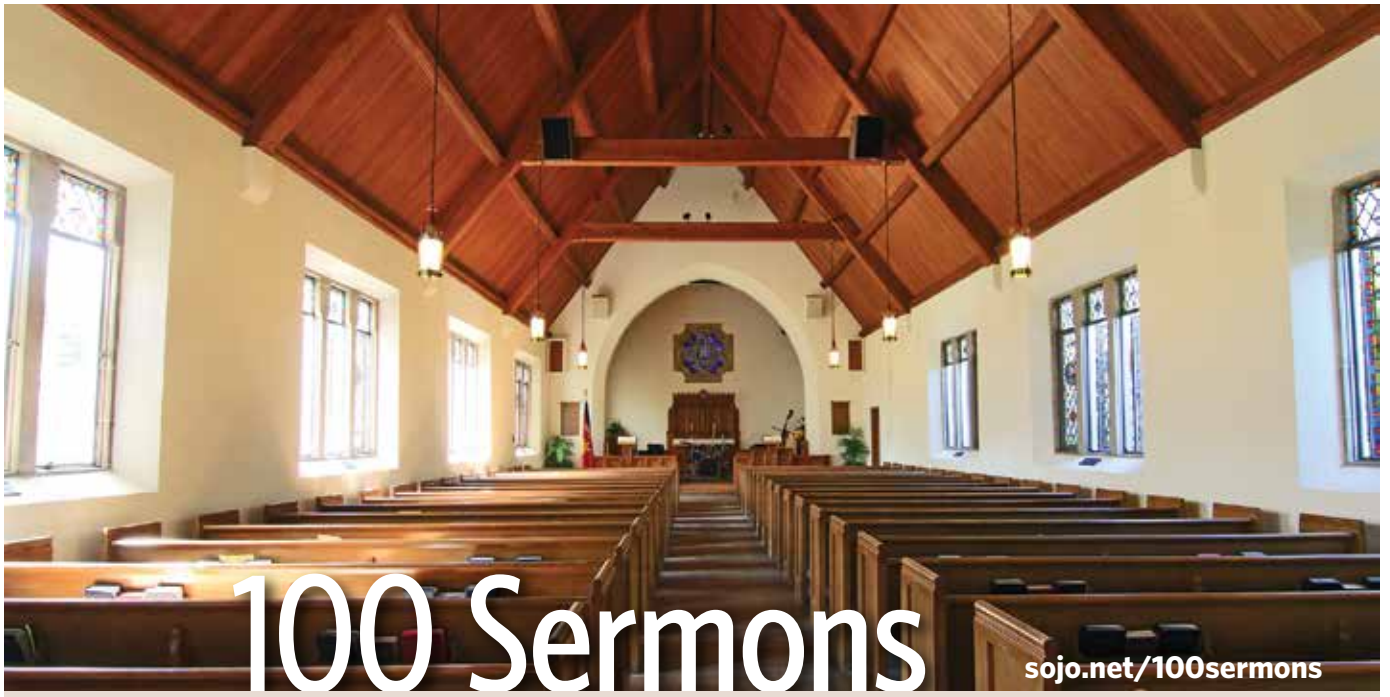
1. Organize and vote against legislation or policies that are not conducive to the sustainability of the environment. Marches and rallies are important and necessary, but challenging and changing policies is essential. Collaboration and cooperation, with a single coordinated purpose, will produce positive results.

2. Be personally prepared to commit. In the 1960s, we believed that sacrifice and risks were fundamental behaviors that would guarantee us our constitutional rights. Similarly, each of us must be personally willing to disavow financial support of any company, product, organization, politician, or group that does not advocate for the climate change movement to progress.

3. Each one, teach one! Educate others on why and how to change lifestyles. Become more conscious of energy efficiency. Energy conservation and preservation are required behavior patterns for the sustainability of the environment.

4. Actively engage with nonprofit organizations such as Sojourners, Interfaith Power & Light, Captain Planet Foundation, Sierra Club, Green the Church, Greenpeace, GreenFaith, Waterkeeper Alliance, ecoAmerica, and The Nature Conservancy. These groups organize, strategize, and mobilize activities that support the sustainability of the Earth and its inhabitants.

Read more at **sojo.net/durley.**



on Domestic and Sexual Violence

Preachers from 28 states, 3 countries, and 20 Christian faith traditions provide resources and inspiration to end the silence on domestic and sexual violence in the church.

A project of the Sojourners Women & Girls Campaign

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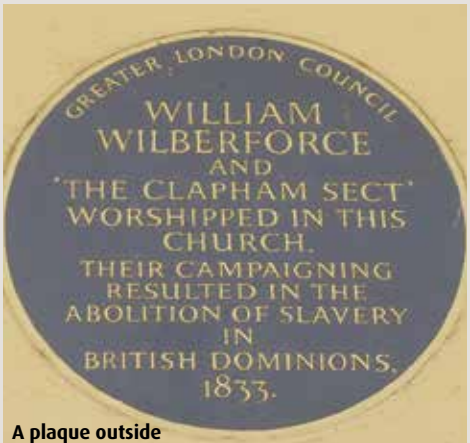
BY LISA SHARON HARPER

When Evangelicals Had Integrity

AS I FLIPPED the pages of Timothy L. Smith's classic, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, a question came to mind: Why did 19th-century evangelicals bundle social concerns, such as slavery and suffrage, with issues that seemed more prudish, such as temperance?

According to historian Ken Burns, by the year 1830 American men consumed seven gallons of alcohol per year, three times more than they consume today. In an era when white women had few legal rights, the scourge of alcohol-related domestic violence gave rise to an evangelical-led grassroots movement that called for temperance and prohibition. It wasn't a "prudish" venture at all, but rather a progressive reform movement aimed at protecting women from violence and abuse.

The same evangelical women and male allies who pushed for temperance also stepped forward on the front lines of the fights for abolition and women's suffrage. They had witnessed the fruit of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Group's fight to end the transatlantic slave trade through England's 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. That monumental victory led the U.S. Congress to pass a similar act the same year. This should have led to abolition, but instead led to the explosion of the U.S. chattel slave economy, a result of the rise of the cotton gin, the establishment of the second Middle Passage from the upper South to the Deep South, and the entrenchment of the barbaric practice of "breeding" free labor. Though the government had outlawed the importation of slaves from Africa, it did not abolish its slave-based economy, but rather expanded it.



A plaque outside Holy Trinity Church in London.

Around the same time, the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek nations were struggling to maintain stewardship of southeastern lands where they had lived for 13,000 years. Despite the Cherokee Nation winning a Supreme Court battle to stay on their land, President Andrew Jackson exercised the power of the gun and bayonet over the power of law. He ordered the army to ignore the Supreme Court's ruling and round up tens of thousands of Indigenous souls for removal. Thousands died on the long walks westward. Their deaths paved the way for King Cotton's chattel rule.

THE PAST YEAR exposed similar assaults on the rules of law, public ethics, and moral decency.

Many people of faith were shocked by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's brazen vow and the Senate GOP's decision to "plow right through" the justified concerns of women, people of color, and immigrants—as well as religious, sexual, and gender minorities—by pushing through Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court. The Senate's confirmation of a judge with a very questionable background to the highest court through an opaquely corrupt process was breathtaking.

But the Republican senators were simply following the lead of their president's disregard for the rule of law. The Trump administration filled the Tornillo internment camp with more than 2,000 refugee and asylum-seeking children *after* the family separations policy ended. The administration continues to ignore the dramatically escalating physical evidence of climate change while dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency. The list goes on. But most striking of all is the continued support that this corrupt administration receives from men and women who claim to be evangelical Christians.

2018 exposed assaults on the rules of law, public ethics, and moral decency.

The one thing that tied all social concerns together for the 19th-century evangelicals was their radical belief in the coming reign of God. Charles Finney called new converts to renounce slavery in submission to the governance of the kingdom of God. Phoebe Palmer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth called believers to renounce the subjugation of women in submission to the rule of God. And Wilberforce called for allegiance to God's kingdom above all others.

Anything short of this, the early evangelicals said, is corruption of our faith. ■

***Lisa Sharon Harper,** author of* The Very Good Gospel, *is founder and president of FreedomRoad.us.*

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SILICON VALLEY'S ORIGINAL SIN

Big Tech offers a world of self-actualization, wealth, and progress. What could go wrong?

by **GAYMON BENNETT**

ON JAN. 9, 2007, STEVE JOBS stepped onto a stage in San Francisco, his trademark black mock-turtleneck blending with the shadowed backdrop, his clipped hair and lean countenance offering a monk-like silhouette against the screen.

Jobs stepped forward and raised his arms. And there it was, almost inconspicuous in the palm of his hand. "Today, Apple is going to reinvent the phone ... here it is ... the iPhone." Naming a new god.

At the time, no one consciously believed that smartphones, the internet of things, or ubiquitous computing would save us. Yet, as the encyclical *Laudato Si* points out about technocracies: No one has to actually believe they're gods. They become gods when we start investing our hope and identity in them.

And here we are. We live as if the connections provided by digital technologies are vital—and indeed we have made them so.

A decade after the first iPhone, environmental engineer Braden Allenby was asked whether, one day, humans would be wired directly into the internet. "Look at any city street," he replied. "At least half the people are looking at their phones. We're already integrated into networks beyond

Images from Shutterstock

our physical environment." Heads bowed, praying to strange new gods.

It began as allure: more accessible music, easier communication, maps and directions. Then it slid toward addiction: picking up the phone in the morning, like a first cigarette of the day. And now, dependence: Our lives are synced, our habits surveilled, our data monetized, and the world goes 'round. Our little intimacies power a vast machinery.

All in the name of improving our lives.

The iPhone is not, of course, the whole story, but it marked a vivid and visceral threshold. Once crossed, our interior lives began to be woven into a wider digital fabric. And while that weave offers moments of self-empowerment and social connection, it also opens us up in unanticipated ways—shaping not only what we do, but who we become.

Standing on that stage, pacing methodically, voice rising and falling with consternation and conviction, Jobs embodied a figure deeply rooted in the American imagination: the revivalist, the preacher, the evangelist, come to tell us good news.

The "good news" on offer may have been utterly mundane: little distractions and big profits. Yet it made manifest the asymmetrical power Silicon Valley has come to exercise over our imaginations, desires, and habits, a power potently linked to the belief that all this innovation will eventually save us (make us healthy, wealthy, and wise)—if we just let it do its job.

LIMITLESS ABUNDANCE

The personal computer wasn't just born of better engineering. It was also born of a potent northern California mix of Christian individualism and Eastern metaphysics, brought together and catalyzed by countercultural politics.

During the 1950s and '60s, a diffuse spirituality could be felt across the Bay Area. There were Zen retreat centers in Marin County to the north, the Gestalt psychology of the Esalen community to the south, and a riot of New Age spiritualities blossoming in Berkeley and San Francisco. At the center was the enticing idea that in our "peak experiences"—our moments of greatest clarity about our truest selves—we discover something transcendent: an oceanic experience of unity-in-difference where our true self is tangled up with, and empowered by, everything else. The cosmos as amplifier.

> We live as if the connections provided by digital technologies are vital—and indeed we have made them so.

For this spirituality, such moments of peak experience seem to reveal that, deep down, the world isn't defined by scarcity or brokenness, but rather by limitless abundance, one hidden behind our small imaginations. As theologian Ted Peters puts it: This is a spirituality that never asks for forgiveness because every limitation or letdown is only an opportunity for growth. A world without shadow.

For countercultural engineers, this vision of abundance took material form in the idea of personal computing. Think about the iPhone: You hold it in the palm of your hand. In a very real sense it is an extension of yourself—your schedule, relations, habits, aspirations. Yet at the same time it is connected to everything else, a vehicle of self-amplification. It's built on the idea that information knows no limits, that technology is the key to abundance, and that the only constraint is failure of imagination.

For most in the 1950s and '60s, the computer was about big business and war—corporate, powerful, centralized. Yet, for a handful, it was also about self-actualization. In the 1930s, the computer pioneer Vannevar Bush had envisioned the "memex"—a machine that could collect human knowledge and make it available whenever needed. Bush's idea never went away.

By the late 1960s, Douglas Engelbart and colleagues at the Stanford Research Institute were making good on the idea that computers could augment human intelligence. By the '70s, countercultural figures such as Stewart Brand were asking whether personal computers might link geographically dispersed experiments in radical democracy.

Underneath it all was something almost metaphysical. The mathematics behind computing were born from the strange physics of quantum mechanics—an enchanted world where information seemed both fundamental and limitless. At the heart of this world was Moore's Law: the discovery that every time the size of a transistor on a computer chip shrank by half, the space on the chip for circuits quadrupled. Moore's Law became a guiding metaphor, the exponential power of computing as both technical and social reality. And once programmers discovered that a few years' work could be transformed, overnight, into a few billion dollars, belief in the abundance unleashed by technology became cultural common sense.

NO NEED TO CHOOSE

In the 1980s and '90s, the world of geeks-in-garages morphed into the machinery of global capitalism. Silicon Valley traded its explicitly spiritual content for the corporate-friendly vibe of self-empowerment.

Yet the vision of abundance remained. Each of the Big 5 companies offered a moral tale about why it should be allowed to reach into every corner of our lives. Microsoft would put "a computer on every desk"; Facebook would "connect everyone"; Google would "organize all knowledge"; Amazon would be "the store for everything." Then Apple, along with the rest, offered a vision for ubiquitous computing—infusing daily existence with artificial intelligence.

The monopoly reach of Big Tech is disquieting for old-fashioned reasons: Monopolies dominate and exploit. Yet equally troubling is how the story tech tells about itself justifies an approach to engineering that aims to remake our very subjectivity. As author Franklin Foer puts it, "Tech monopolies aspire to mold humanity into their desired image." The more we use their tools and infrastructures, the more our behaviors get caught in an inexorable feedback loop with their algorithms. Our activities and affections sync up with Big Tech's ambitions.

"[Big tech corporations] intend for us to turn unthinkingly to them for information

Apple CEO Steve Jobs introduces the iPhone in 2007.

Apple

and entertainment while they catalogue our intentions and aversions," continues Foer. "They think they have the opportunity to complete the long merger between [human] and machine—to redirect the trajectory of human evolution." That may sound overblown. Yet, in quiet ways, the impulse to transform humanity is all over the Valley.

Consider Facebook. For more than a decade, Facebook has invited us to upload our most intimate moments—weddings, births, parties, griefs, joys, laughs. Its business model is all about surveilling this trove of intimacy, picking it over, and asserting its algorithms in unobtrusive ways that begin to steer our habits and desires. And what Facebook does with our friendships, Alexa is doing to our homes, and wearable devices to our bodies.

For a long time, most of us shrugged this off as the price of progress. Then the Edward Snowden affair, Russian trolls, and Cambridge Analytica forced us to face the fact that little nudges of inclination and appetite produce profound effects. We're being governed by micro-adjustments.

> Jobs embodied a figure deeply rooted in the American imagination: the revivalist, the preacher, the evangelist.

Nevertheless, the Valley's vision for a transformed humanity is protected from critical examination by its central tenet of faith: Innovation is always good, and more is always better. Create powerful technologies, improve humanity and the planet, and make piles of money. All at once, no need to choose.

MIT professor Erik Brynjolfsson, a true believer, puts it like this: "Technology can create enormous bounty, but the road to abundance may be very rocky as existing business models and ways of creating value are disrupted." If there's any negative fallout from innovation, not to worry. It's just the birth pangs of a new order.

This is where the countercultural roots of Silicon Valley, which might otherwise be inspiring, prove dangerous. The secularized spirituality of Big Tech—that information is unlimited, technology abundant, and imagination king—buffers it against any ability to contemplate its own potential evil. The Big 5 may admit to data breaches or the occasional bad actor, but for them, true innovation is always unalloyed.

It's this belief—that technology will save us because there are no real tradeoffs between self-actualization, wealth, and progress—that ultimately makes the wheels go 'round. The real story of Silicon Valley is a story of faith that admits no darkness. Innovation is all light and no shadow. Which may sound good. But without recognizing shadow, there can be no moral realism. And without moral realism, the potential for genuine innovation, beyond superficial updates, is gone.

HOLY MATTER

The new gods of Silicon Valley aren't alone in this. The belief that light can be purified from darkness has been the fantasy of many regimes of human power. It's a way of assuring ourselves that darkness is only "out there" and never "in here."

Christians certainly aren't immune from these seductions. Turn on the news and watch. Why else would St. Paul have warned the believers at Corinth to steer clear of those masquerading as "angels of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14)? When it comes to self-righteousness and the dangerous denials that accompany it, there's a long list of offenders.

But if Christians have been among the offenders, they've also pioneered practices to help resist the lure of believing life can be all light and no shadow. There are lots of examples. Surprisingly, one of the most politically potent forms of resistance has been the Christian notion of sacrament—holy matter. It's surprising, because many moderns think of sacrament as a "mere" symbol, one that is primarily about personal (i.e. not political) belief.

It's politically potent because the politics of holy matter resists splitting light from shadow. It does this by refusing to hive off material from spiritual life. Often, those in power who want to claim self-righteousness do so by valorizing spirituality over materiality—as if darkness and evil were all on the material side of the ledger. The biblical metaphor of false "angels of light" reminds us things are more complicated.

For much of Christian history, the material side of holy matter really mattered. It mattered because sacrament emphasizes the deep and inextricable connections between God and the world, spirit and flesh. Holy matter is a radical proposition that the being of God is so deeply entwined in the world that divine presence imprints on materiality itself.

Christians have long used the politics of holy matter to counter the injustices of their day. Think of groups such as the Catholic Worker movement, which embodied a theological response to industrialization. For the Catholic Workers, the trouble with the exploitative institutions of industrialization—the factory and the state—was that, by regimenting and "individualizing" the worker (everyone is given a number, punches a timeclock, and stands in line), those institutions created a form of life marked by a combination of pacification (comply with the routine) and extraction (routines will activate your energy and channel it).

That combination effectively cut off the human person from the earth, from daily connection to family, from spontaneous creativity, and ultimately—in the view of many activists—from life lived in the divine image. Industrialists, of course, saw all this as nothing more than the birth pangs of a new order.

It's no accident that the Catholic Worker movement (and others) looked to cooperative farming as one form of earthy salvation: Farm work might break the body, but unlike the factory, it doesn't break the soul. It doesn't break the soul because it keeps you connected—in a real, material way—to land, family, and community.

Behind it all was the logic of holy matter. If you work with your hands, you participate in God's work. Sacrament in the stuff of everyday life—abundant connection.

> The secularized spirituality of Big Tech buffers it against any ability to contemplate its own potential evil.

Here's the key: By holding flesh and spirit together, holy matter keeps us close to the fragility of life. And when we stay close to the fragility of life, we can't be naïve about the deep entanglements we all experience between good and bad, precious and mundane, beauty and tragedy, light and shadow. Sacrament is all about grace, to be sure—enlivened matter. But it's about matter nonetheless: grace through the mysterious entanglements of life.

This matters for Silicon Valley. Things go sideways when we imagine ourselves only on the side of the light. One way we do that is by denying the graceful nature of matter, turning all our attention to spirit. That's what Silicon Valley has done. Replace "spirit" with "information" and you get the picture.

Put differently, Silicon Valley has taken the Christian impulse toward finding abundance in everyday stuff and given it a twist. Like holy matter, a digitally networked society is a mysterious entanglement. But unlike the entanglement of holy matter, the connections of a networked society are algorithmic: a step-wise control of processes that reshape us through the play of information. Those interactive manipulations have real, and sometimes dark, effects. When those effects get cast as nothing more than the "rocky road" of "disruption" on the way to abundance, they don't get taken seriously.

When you talk to people in the Valley about the kind of tangled world imagined by holy matter, they get excited: They too hate that the modern world has become so fragmented and exploitative, hence the good they see in connectivity.

Yet if you take the idea of holy matter seriously, then life is already tangled up: the world in God, God in the world, people in one another. From that perspective, computers don't actually produce connections where there were none before—and so they certainly don't "save" us. True, they give us new ways of activating and inhabiting our connections to one another—and that can't be taken for granted. But in doing so they've also "algorithmized" life, setting loose a machinery of transformation whose contradictions are abundantly clear.

LIGHT AND SHADOW

Which brings us back to shadow.

The trouble with the Valley, the trouble with the gospel of the iPhone, ubiquitous computing, and automation, is that it has been pursued as if technology doesn't have shadow. That lack of moral realism is problematic twice over. Once because it invites power without restraint. But also—and just as important—because it constitutes what entrepreneurs call an "opportunity cost." You won't bother with soul-searching if you think an engineering patch will do.

Christianity, like other great spiritual traditions, is filled with rich and lively metaphors of darkness and shadow: the cleft of the rock, the shadow of the mother's wing, the earthiness of the womb, the vitality of the tomb. There might seem to be a world of difference between these enlivening metaphors of darkness and the kind of darkness that Silicon Valley has refused to acknowledge. But the thing about these biblical metaphors is that they're simultaneously about devastation and shelter, loss and renewal, death and new life. Always both at the same time. That is their power: the hope of resurrection—the promise underwriting Christian notions of salvation. The tomb is empty, and thus, crazily, it's a scene of vitalization. Yet it is still a tomb, a place marked by death and brokenness. The traces of death and brokenness don't go away. They get transformed.

For anyone who has gone through the darkness of the grave in their own life, the power of redemption is that, in the midst of despair, you find the Spirit still holds you. In that moment, you discover that God can

Continued on Page 42

BRAYAN CORRA EL NIÑO

A Church Uncontained

Divided by borders but united in the Spirit, the body of Christ assembles under the watch of the U.S. Border Patrol.

by **CARINA JULIG**

At the border between San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, people come together once a week for communion across the dividing line. El Faro: The Border Church/La Iglesia Fronteriza is held every Sunday on both sides of the border. For some families, it is their only opportunity to see loved ones who have been separated from them by immigration status.

The service is at Friendship Park, or "El Parque de la Amistad," the piece of land that lies between the mesh border fence and the larger border wall that keeps the United States separate from Mexico. Usually, the outer wall is closed, cordoning off any opportunities for people on opposite sides of the border to connect. But for four hours each weekend it opens. For most people, the border is a place of division. But for Pastor John Fanestil, the borderland, or "la fronteriza," is "a place of encounter."

Fanestil, who preaches at First United Methodist Church of San Diego, has been running El Faro: The Border Church for almost a decade. He meets me at the trailhead of Border Field State Park, the 1,000-plus-acre San Diego nature preserve that borders the sprawling metropolis of Tijuana. In the summer months, you can drive all the way down to the border, but the trail floods when it rains and is often closed to vehicles in the winter. Today, it's shut because of a sewage spill from Tijuana, so we hike down.

Fanestil was raised in La Jolla, an upscale neighborhood in San Diego, but says that his first real introduction to Spanish culture was in Costa Rica, where he did a year of seminary. His first appointment after ordination was in the inland border town of Calexico, Calif., which

Left, worshippers gather on the U.S. side of Border Church to join with friends from Mexico in seeking God's grace and pardon. Below, Lucia Torres concelebrates communion on the Mexican side of the border wall.

Christian Ramirez (opposite page)/Robert Vivar

"The things made by human hands will come and go, but the love of God will remain forever."

is adjacent to its Mexican sister city, Mexicali. He fell in love with the border culture, and after serving congregations in Los Angeles and Orange Country, he was placed in San Diego in 2004.

When he arrived, the outer border wall hadn't been built yet, and Friendship Park was easier to access. An annual celebration of Las Posadas, a Latin American re-enactment of the nativity story, was held there. Then, in 2006, the federal government bought the border land to build a second wall and intended to close Friendship Park entirely. Activists fought to keep it open and negotiated with the Border Patrol to maintain partial access, but it was closed for several years as the wall was built. After it reopened, Fanestil celebrated communion at the border for the first time.

Communion undaunted by barriers

It's a windy, overcast day in San Diego, and the marine layer at the coastline makes the temperature drop. We trudge along the heavy sand at the state park beach, and I'm struck by how empty it is—a rarity for Southern California at any time of year. Fanestil jokes that this is "the only empty beach in San Diego." It's true: Besides the two of us, the only creatures at the water are snowy plovers leaving delicate tracks in the sand. In the distance, I can see people relaxing at the beach in Playas de Tijuana, right across the border. The giant metal wall goes straight into the ocean and continues for about a hundred yards, like the inverse of a pier.

Robert Vivar

Worshippers gather in both the United States and Mexico to share a prayer of confession with their hands on the border wall.

There are only about a dozen or so people when we get to the U.S. side of the border, along with two Border Patrol agents. One of the agents greets us and says that he's already stopped two people trying to cross the border this morning.

The border fence mesh is so thick that it's almost hard to see through, but dozens of people are on the other side of the border, along with booths, live music, and an immigration lawyer giving free legal advice.

Fanestil says that Border Church mainly takes place in Mexico, and the U.S. contingent is mostly there "in solidarity." The service is much easier to access in Tijuana. There are no barriers, and a residential district is built right up to this part of the border.

Most people who attend the service are deportees living in Tijuana to be close to their families in the U.S. Families are clustered around the fence, talking to relatives on the other side of the border. The mesh is too narrow for people to hug or hold hands, so people exchange "besos de meñiques"—pinky kisses.

"The fence, for me, means death," says Guillermo Navarrete. Navarrete is a pastor in Tijuana and runs Border Church on the Mexican side of the fence. These days, his main ministry is caring for those who have been deported from the U.S. to Tijuana.

"Jesus, in the last three years of his ministry, only went to the temple about three times," Navarrete says, explaining the model for his work. "We spend time in the streets."

He speaks passionately about the deportees, who arrive in Mexico with little but the clothes on their backs. For many, Border Church is their only opportunity to see family.

"People from every state in the U.S. and every state in Mexico have been to Border Church," Fanestil tells me. People on their deathbeds come to say goodbye, while others bring their newborns to introduce grandparents to their grandchildren.

Passing the peace with fingertips

Fanestil plugs a microphone into a sound system to start the service, while Navarrete plays guitar. The service is bilingual, with most of it in Spanish. Songs are sung, prayers are offered, and Fanestil reads the gospel text in Spanish. It's Epiphany Sunday, and the text is about the journey of Los Reyes Magos—the three kings. The story is apt: Soon after the Magi's visit, Mary and Joseph flee Bethlehem and become migrants themselves to save infant Jesus from Herod's wrath.

After the sermon, Fanestil offers up a prayer. "Turn this wall into the cradle of Christ," he beseeches. "Remind us that the love of God is more powerful than any wall ... The things made by human hands will come and go, but the love of God will remain forever."

We receive communion and share the "paz de Cristo" across the border. I touch pinkies with a woman in Tijuana, the fence so thick that it takes effort to make our fingers touch.

During the service, I chat with local activist Enrique Morones, who tells me that his faith has a huge influence on his work.

"Faith without works is dead," says Morones. Morones was born in San Diego to Mexican immigrant parents and runs the faith-based organization Border Angels. He is Catholic and says that he tries to embody servant leadership in his work. He points to Fanestil as a good example of someone who "doesn't go around telling people what they should be doing: He just does his thing."

Morones founded Border Angels in 1986. The group is most famous for their water drops, where they leave water along the desert routes that migrants take when attempting to cross into the U.S. He claims that the San Diego border wall has contributed to the deaths of more than 11,000 migrants who died of dehydration trying to cross the border inland, where the deadly desert serves as the primary barrier. An investigation by humanitarian groups revealed

At left, John Fanestil, a Methodist pastor in San Diego, has led a weekly celebration of communion on the U.S-Mexico border since 2011. Below, Guillermo Navarrete, lay leader of the Border Church community in Tijuana, shares communion on the Mexico side of the border wall.

Robert Vivar/Scott Bennett

that ICE agents routinely sabotage water that aid groups leave for migrants. When I ask about the Border Angels' water supply, Morones says that they have had their water vandalized, but they do not know by whom.

Along with water drops, Border Angels also does outreach to day laborers, visits the graves of unidentified immigrants, and facilitates the opening of the border fence several times a year, so that families can hug. Crystal, a young woman who was at one of the border openings, is at the church service talking with her family. At the opening, she gets the opportunity to hug her daughter after being apart from her for almost a year.

Crystal says her main feeling, when she got to hug her daughter, was sadness—because she didn't want to let her go.

"Nobody likes to be separated from their family," she tells me in Spanish.

Faith deepened by solidarity

Border Angels has recently drawn criticism from the Border Patrol, due to an unplanned wedding at one of the door-opening events in November 2017 in which the groom turned out to have a drug smuggling conviction, and the Border Patrol threatened to stop opening the fence. But when I ask about the incident, Morones seems unbothered by it. He says they've delivered similar threats in the past, but they never last.

"Forget about the door opening: I want the wall to come down," he says. "But it will."

I'm surprised by how confident he is in such an anti-immigration political climate. President Trump launched his campaign on the promise of building a border wall, and the six prototypes for that wall are in San Diego, just a short distance from the park.

But the idea that the border needs to be completely controlled is largely a post-9/11 invention, even among conservatives. In 1971, First Lady Pat Nixon visited San Diego to dedicate Border Field State Park. Her security detail cut the barbed wire fence at the border so that she could greet the Mexican citizens on the other side.

"I hope there won't be a fence here too long," she is reported to have said.

Fanestil describes his ministry using the word *compañerismo*, which loosely translates as solidarity, or fellowship. He says he believes that the church should walk alongside people in their journeys, and that faith communities that don't do that are missing something.

"Many people will never connect with religious communities that don't do that, because there's no point of contact with their lived experience," Fanestil says.

Fanestil explains that differentiating between the sacred and the secular is largely an American concept, foreign to the Latin American communities he's worked with. Instead, those communities conceptualize their whole lives through a religious lens, including their migrant experience. He says that this view of the world has helped to deepen his own faith.

"I feel like I learn and grow from my relationship with this community much more than I shape or teach," Fanestil says.

Every Sunday, despite challenges

Sobering news for El Faro: The Border Church arrived in February 2018. The Border Patrol has restricted access to the park, now only allowing 10 people in at a time. If more than 10 people want access, they will have to be rotated in, in shifts, meaning some people will only have half an hour with their families.

"These restrictions have already hurt families," Morones says.

Fanestil points to the Border Patrol's anger over the border wedding as the reason for the restriction, though the Border Patrol claims it is because of agent shortages. Fanestil says that it is unfair to punish so many families for the wedding, especially since Border Church is not associated at all with the border opening events.

"It's very frustrating," Fanestil says. "Families are only going to get to see each other for 30 minutes, and a lot of them travel very long distances to get here."

Currently, 10 people at a time remains the official policy, but as of September 2018, the agent on duty at Friendship Park can exercise discretion over how many people to let in. Fanestil says that in the past several weeks, his group has been allowed to enter the park for Border Church services without any restrictions.

Border Church has also had low attendance on the U.S. side because the stricter climate around immigration has led people to fear that they or their loved ones will be deported if they visit Friendship Park. Fanestil says that anytime there's increased concern about enforcement of immigration laws, it discourages people from going to the park.

Despite the setbacks, Border Church will continue. "It cramps our style on the U.S. side, but our style has been cramped for a long time," Fanestil says. Regardless of tall fences and tumultuous immigration policies, he will be at the border every Sunday, Bible and microphone in hand. ■

Carina Julig *(@CarinaJulig) is a reporter from San Diego specializing in the intersection of religion and politics.*

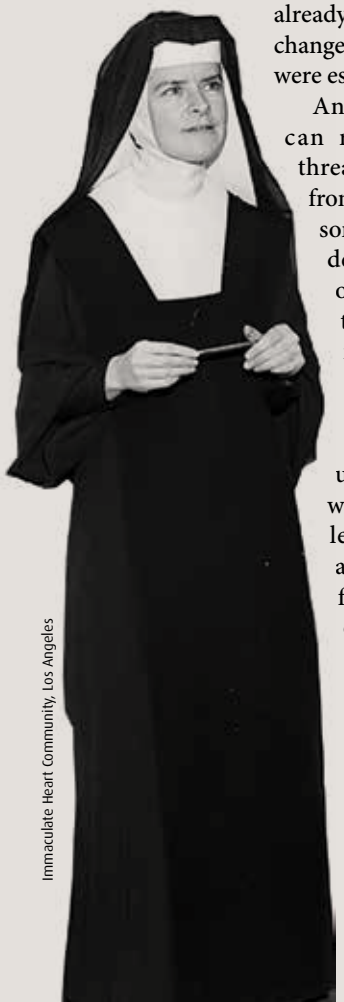
BY CATHERINE WOODIWISS

The Aesthetics of Joy

IN MY FIRST week of design school, I found myself riding Austin's notoriously limited public transit system, asking fellow riders why they used it, what would encourage them to ride more often, and what they would change about the service.

After a handful of interviews, my rides yielded an unexpected insight: Users didn't like Capital Metro's expanded hours and new bus routes. The changes, implemented in June, were ostensibly for the riders' benefit. But people's routine included a strong aversion to change. And for a population already dealing with a rapid rate of change in their city, the new routes were especially disorienting.

Sister Corita Kent saw the potential of joyful design to provoke the public conscience.



Immaculate Heart Community, Los Angeles

Sister Corita Kent in 1964 and her 1984 stamp, right.

Any externally forced change can represent an existential threat—as we know all too well from our daily news cycles. Even something as small as the sudden restructuring of our—or our kids'—commute can throw our perceptions of relational, financial, or political safety into jeopardy.

We're in a wearying time. And looking at CapMetro users' responses, I began to wonder whether we can build levity into a daily commute as a form of comfort blanket for these users. How can we offer delight as an antidote to people who are really, *really* weary of change?

Designer Ingrid Fetell Lee has been studying the effects of joy and delight in our civic practices. She has found that consistent "aesthetics of joy"—bright color, rounded shapes, a sense of abundance—translate across age, race, and gender. People universally report feeling delighted, inspired, comforted, reassured, and safe in the presence of these aesthetic touches.

"Then why does so much of the world look like *this*?" she asked in an April 2018 TED talk as she showed slides of beige cubicles and desks, grey school lockers, and rows of dark, rectangular office buildings. "Why do we send our kids to schools that look like this? Why do our cities look like this? And this is most acute for the places that house the people that are most vulnerable among us: nursing homes, hospitals, homeless shelters, housing projects."

Some public buildings have begun intentionally incorporating the aesthetics of joy, notably in Publicolor's bright reimaginings of New York City public schools. And after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the new building there incorporated features that made it not just secure, but joyful: Aluminum trees, color-paned windows, and waves over door frames all hide safety features while turning the school into a work of art.

As I work out what civic joy can mean in a time of anger and grief, I am also revisiting images made in another time—by an activist nun. In the political turmoil of the 1960s, Sister Corita Kent, IHM, saw the potential of joyful design to provoke the public conscience. An artist and educator, her work focused on poverty, hunger, war, and social justice, these urgent subjects disguised under Warholian colors, shapes, and quotes from pop songs, political slogans, and the Bible.

Her most famous work is her iconic rainbow-colored "Love" stamp. But perhaps her most provocative creation is an interpretation of Communion as a bright, blobby package of Wonder Bread, accompanied by a scribbled line from Gandhi: "There are so many hungry people that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread."

In 1983, commissioned by Physicians for Social Responsibility, Kent created a giant billboard sketch evoking blooming fields and a blue sky, declaring that "we can create life without war." She is said to have later called the sketch the most religious thing she's done.

Kent's influence lives on in some public explorations of joy today. When global design company IDEO moved its studio in Cambridge, Mass., to a new neighborhood, Michael Hendrix, partner and executive design director of IDEO Cambridge, sought out an aesthetic of "calculated joy" that would reflect the spirit of the activist sister.

"Today's headlines are a 1960s déjà vu: culture wars, social injustice, sexual harassment, mass shootings, covert ops, media corruption, political failure," Hendrix wrote on his company blog. "I've personally wondered how Kent made the shift to rainbows and love, and I mean that with no irony. ... Maybe it comes down to this simple truth: Love wins."

"The drive toward joy is the drive toward life," said Lee. In our civic life, as in our designing, may we seek out the joy. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss, *former deputy web editor at Sojourners, is a journalist and designer in Austin, Texas.*

BY JONATHAN ROWE

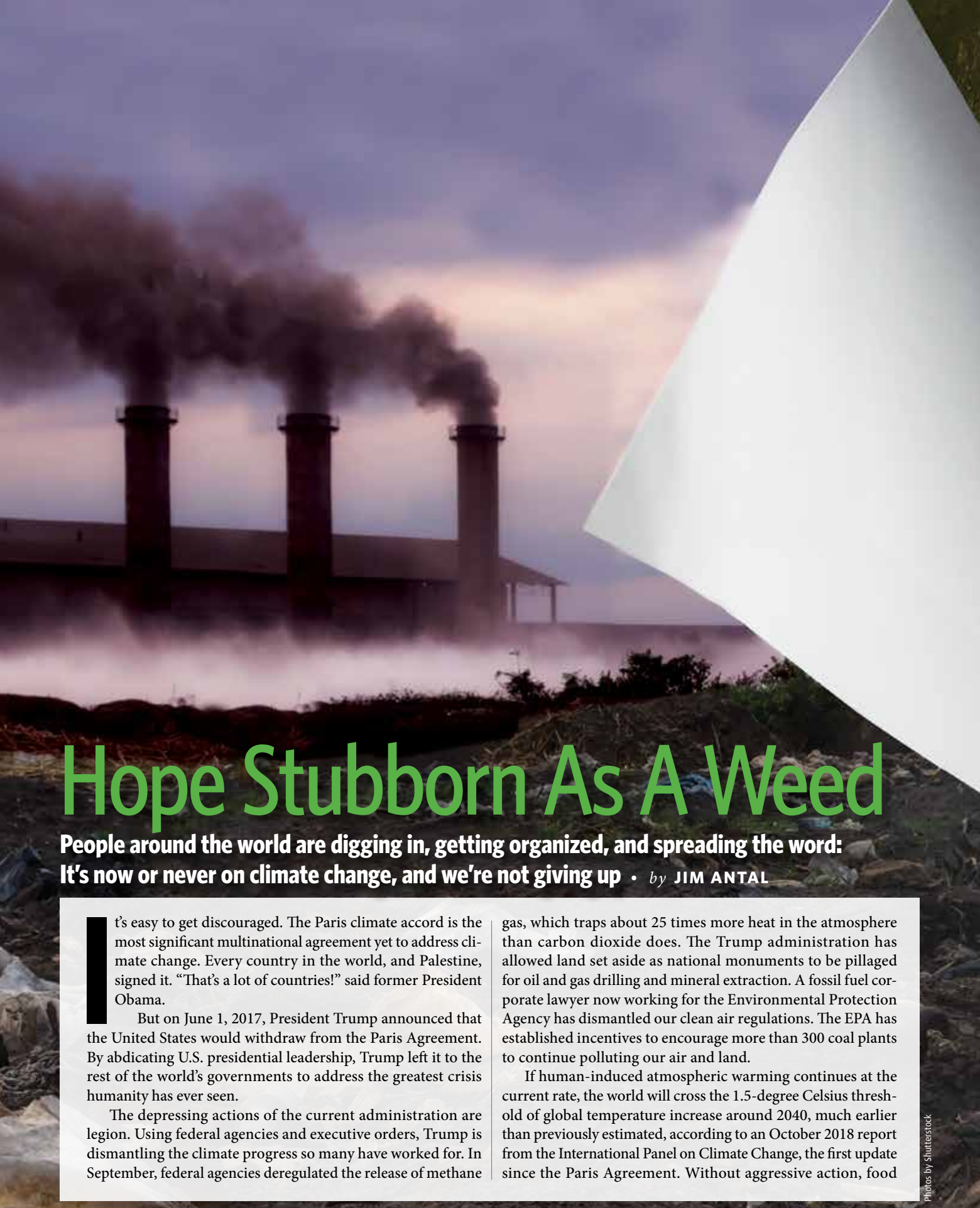
A gravestone (circa 400 C.E.) from the Greek island of Naxos on display at the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens.

Testimony of the Holy Manger

"The last will be first, and the first will be last."—Matthew 20:16

I know what I am:
an earthen vessel guiding cows, goats, and sheep's
chaotic feeding, their chorus of maws bleating,
baying, snapping open and shut a celebration
of the pastoral. Seen and unseen like a beggar
one passes by, I exist as an unwashed bowl,
coated with herbs, grains, and seeds chewed,
swallowed and spit out. But one winter night,
I held a newborn denied a bed in Bethlehem,
glowing beneath an eastern star's light. He
transformed me into an altar for shepherds
and magi's adoration, a throne elevated from
lowliness to honor, a cradle for a God made flesh.

Jonathan Rowe *(@jwrowe93) is a poet and essayist from Boston.*



Hope Stubborn As A Weed

People around the world are digging in, getting organized, and spreading the word: It's now or never on climate change, and we're not giving up • *by* JIM ANTAL

It's easy to get discouraged. The Paris climate accord is the most significant multinational agreement yet to address climate change. Every country in the world, and Palestine, signed it. "That's a lot of countries!" said former President Obama.

But on June 1, 2017, President Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the Paris Agreement. By abdicating U.S. presidential leadership, Trump left it to the rest of the world's governments to address the greatest crisis humanity has ever seen.

The depressing actions of the current administration are legion. Using federal agencies and executive orders, Trump is dismantling the climate progress so many have worked for. In September, federal agencies deregulated the release of methane gas, which traps about 25 times more heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide does. The Trump administration has allowed land set aside as national monuments to be pillaged for oil and gas drilling and mineral extraction. A fossil fuel corporate lawyer now working for the Environmental Protection Agency has dismantled our clean air regulations. The EPA has established incentives to encourage more than 300 coal plants to continue polluting our air and land.

If human-induced atmospheric warming continues at the current rate, the world will cross the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold of global temperature increase around 2040, much earlier than previously estimated, according to an October 2018 report from the International Panel on Climate Change, the first update since the Paris Agreement. Without aggressive action, food

Photos by Shutterstock

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in their field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

—Matthew 13:31-32

shortages and wildfires will worsen, water shortages will hit urban areas, killer heatwaves and violent storms will be more frequent, coastal areas will experience sea level rise, and populations will migrate. Humanity must become laser focused on achieving net zero emissions if creation as we know it is to survive. In other words, it's now or never on climate change.

But as poet Theodore Roethke reminds us, "In a dark time, the eye begins to see."

Millions of courageous people throughout the world *are* acting to save our future. Individually these actions may seem small and inconsequential. But they are seeds, and, as Jesus taught, seeds are powerful, the source of something much larger. And just as important, as any gardener trying to beat back midsummer weeds can tell you: Seeds are made to spread and multiply.

"Like a mustard seed ..."

Most Americans are committed to building climate resiliency. Some 79 percent foresee a serious problem for the U.S. if nothing is done to prevent global warming, according to a July 2018 survey by ABC News, Stanford University, and Resources for the Future. Ordinary Americans, governors, mayors, business leaders, and community institutions are working to accelerate and make inevitable a quick transition to clean, renewable energy.

Following Trump's announcement to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, California Gov. Jerry Brown and Michael Bloomberg, the U.N. special envoy for climate action, launched America's Pledge. This initiative documents and encourages efforts by nonfederal U.S. organizations to drive down greenhouse gas emissions in keeping with the goals set in Paris. In a parallel movement, companies, universities, environmental organizations, and other regional bodies initiated We Are Still In. As of August, more than 2,800 signatories (representing more than 150 million people, 17 states, 400 cities, and GDP totaling $9.6 trillion) have pledged to meet the goal of limiting global warming to "well below 2 degrees Celsius." The U.S. Climate Alliance and U.S. Climate Mayors are also offering leadership.

"[T]his 'bottom up' movement will put us within striking distance of the U.S. commitment to the Paris Agreement, even with zero support from our federal government," said Bloomberg.

"Fulfilling America's Pledge," a 2018 study funded by Bloomberg and conducted by independent researchers, indicates that the U.S. is almost halfway to the Paris target of reducing, by 2025, CO_2 emissions by 26 to 28 percent below what they were in 2005.

"This momentum in turn sets the stage for more rapid decarbonization in the 2025-2030 period. This analysis demonstrates that essential deep decarbonization (80 percent or more by 2050) can be led by the bottom-up efforts of real economy actors—but only with deep collaboration and engagement," the Bloomberg study reports.

Ahead of the September Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, Gov. Brown signed an executive order calling for California to achieve "zero carbon emissions by 2045." Brown also signed SB100 into law, committing California—the world's fifth-largest economy—to receiving 100 percent of its electricity from noncarbon renewable sources by 2045. Combined, these bold actions extend California's carbon reduction beyond the electricity sector and into the whole economy, including transportation, agriculture, and construction.

Hawaii has also committed to transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy. Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Washington, D.C., will likely follow.

These important actions in response to the Paris pledge are only the beginning.

"Someone took the seed and sowed it ..."

People of faith are realizing that we need to have an impact on both the demand side and the supply side of the energy market. The cost of wind and solar power is plummeting, becoming even cheaper in some places than fossil fuel power. Several Christian denominations are leading in this necessary and inevitable transition.

In 2013, the United Church of Christ became the first religious body and first national body in the U.S. to vote to divest from fossil fuel companies. Other religious groups soon followed. Around the world, philanthropic organizations, colleges, universities, cities, pension programs, and the entire country of Ireland have joined the movement. Thus far, nearly 900 institutions, with total assets of more than $6 trillion, have committed to divest from fossil fuel holdings.

In 2016, 30,000 members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church passed its first climate resolution. The AME Church is committed to supporting climate policies that protect families, create healthy and safe communities, and build a clean energy future.

In 2017, the Disciples of Christ voted unanimously to commit its individual members, congregations, and ministries to achieve carbon neutrality in their individual and communal lives by the year 2030.

In addition, a total of 122 Catholic institutions have announced their commitment to step away from fossil fuels, according to the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

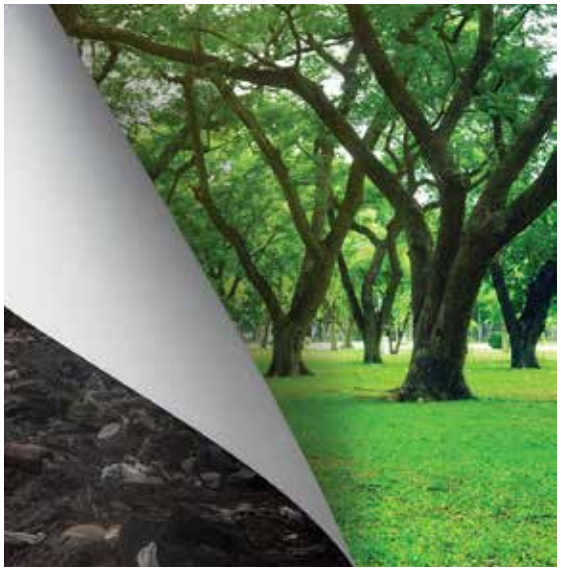
In June 2018, Western and Eastern religious leaders, representing 1.6 billion people, convened to confront the climate crisis. Bartholomew I, ecumenical patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, gathered 200 leaders from the fields of science, government, public policy, business, and religion in Greece to examine the most up-to-date climate science, current climate-change threats, and the most promising strategic responses.

As the gathering concluded, Pope Francis took the unprecedented step of summoning the CEOs of the top oil and gas companies (ExxonMobil, BP, Royal Dutch Shell, Pemex, and others), as well as the money managers of major financial institutions, for a meeting in Rome. The

We are living on the hinge of history:

the first generation to foresee, and the final generation with an opportunity to forestall, the most catastrophic consequences of climate change.

pope acknowledged that we face a challenge "of epochal proportions" and urged industry leaders to embrace this immense opportunity for a rapid transition to renewable forms of energy. We have a duty "toward millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, poorer countries and generations yet to come," said Pope Francis.



Also in 2018, the revival of the Poor People's Campaign in the U.S. helped thousands to recognize the intersectionality of all justice issues, asserting that clean water, air, and a healthy environment are fundamental human rights. They called for public resources to be used to reverse the polluting impacts of the fossil fuel industry. The terrible truth is that the most economically vulnerable are hit first and worst by the ravages of climate change.

"It is the smallest of all the seeds, but ..."

Bottom-up efforts by people of faith and others are germinating substantive social change. Over the past decade, thousands have risked arrest by blocking the expansion of the fossil fuel infrastructure as part of a "keep it in the ground" movement.

In 2017, 20 to 30 percent of delegates at the United Church of Christ national synod indicated that they had engaged in civil disobedience to stop government actions they considered morally wrong.

In Pennsylvania, an order of Catholic nuns was told by the government that a field they owned would be claimed by eminent domain for a fracked-gas pipeline. The nuns responded by building a chapel in that field—right in the path of the proposed pipeline.

The Indigenous Peoples of Canada won a temporary victory in August 2017 when Canada's federal court overturned the approval of Kinder Morgan Canada's Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project.

Here's how we can know that these and other actions of civil disobedience are having a profound impact:

In August, Louisiana made it a felony to trespass at a pipeline site. Thirty-one states have considered similar legislation. The Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency have organized "field force operations" to teach "mass-arrest procedures," "riot-control formations," and other "crowd-control methods," specifically for pipeline protests.

Just as Jesus' first-century followers resisted the oppression of the Roman Empire, people of faith today are speaking truth to power. In these dark times, nonviolent civil disobedience must become a normative expression of discipleship in Christian communities. And we must support one another in enduring the cost of this discipleship.

When the Trump administration initiated its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the United Church of Christ responded by passing (by 97 percent) a resolution declaring the need for a new moral era on climate change, naming three moral imperatives.

First, clergy must accept the mantle of moral leadership and preach on climate change.

Second, all people of faith need to "incarnate the changes we long for" by "making decisions of integrity in our energy choices" and by "undoing the disproportionate impact of climate change on communities of color, Indigenous communities, and poor white communities around the world."

Third, all must "proclaim truth in the public square." We must "resist all expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and demand new sources of renewable energy that are accessible to all communities." One year later, the Presbyterian General Assembly passed a nearly identical resolution.

We can take heart. People of faith are providing moral leadership, prophesying a course of action, experimenting with its implementation, and living into God's future.

"When it has grown ..."

The "future"—represented by a courageous, unrelenting group of teenagers—is also suing the federal government and corporations for their failure to mitigate climate change.

Our Children's Trust filed Juliana v. United States in 2015, a constitutional climate-change lawsuit against the federal government. The 21 youth plaintiffs argue that it is the government's duty to protect the climate and that the plaintiffs have a

Continued on Page 45

CRUEL and All Too Usual

Across the country, people are punished for being homeless—but advocates are using the courts to fight back.

by **TRISTIA BAUMAN** *and* **TED BRACKMAN**

IT IS CRUEL TO PUNISH people for their poverty, but at every level of government, poor people are targeted for unfair treatment under the law. There is perhaps no clearer example of this than the growing criminalization of homelessness in the United States.

The criminalization of homelessness refers to a broad set of policies that punish people for having no indoor homes, such as local laws that prohibit sleeping, sitting, or lying down in outdoor public space. Since 2006, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (the Law Center) has tracked the explosive growth of these laws, including a 143 percent increase in those that outlaw living in vehicles. This is often the last refuge for poor families, the elderly, and disabled people who have been priced out of the rental market. Today, for example, half of the U.S. cities surveyed restrict sleeping and sheltering oneself outdoors, even when there are no alternative places to go.

Rather than address the root causes of homelessness, such as low wages that have not kept pace with rapidly rising rents, these policies merely punish people for living outside. Meanwhile, people who are sleeping in tents, lying down on sidewalks, and living in their vehicles are doing so because they are too poor to afford other housing. To jail, ticket, or threaten them for it only makes the problem worse.

Photos by Santiago Mejia and Shutterstock

Half of the U.S. cities surveyed restrict sleeping outdoors, even when there are no alternatives.

People brought to jail for living in public often cannot afford cash bail, so they frequently accept criminal convictions to temporarily regain their freedom. They are then released back to the same streets, with the same lack of options, but with new fees and criminal records that make it even more difficult to get into housing and out of public space. This cycle is expensive and wastes community resources that would be better invested in permanent housing and other proven cost-effective solutions to homelessness.

Moreover, it is unconstitutional. In a landmark decision in Martin v. City of Boise, the 9th Circuit—the highest federal court in the Western United States—ruled that it is unconstitutionally cruel under the Eighth Amendment to punish unhoused people for sleeping outside when they lack accessible housing and shelter. All human beings must rest, even if their only option is to sleep outside in a public space. To make that life-sustaining activity a crime is akin to punishing a person simply for being homeless.

Yet, despite the cruelty, ineffectiveness, and expense of policies criminalizing homelessness, they remain popular among lawmakers eager to give the appearance of doing "something"—even if it ultimately worsens the problem. The result is a grossly disproportionate number of homeless people arrested and booked into our overflowing jails. A recent investigative report by *The Oregonian* found that 50 percent of all arrests last year in Portland were of homeless people, who make up only 3 percent of the general Portland population.

'We have no place for you'

The criminalization of homelessness is not limited to large urban centers. The problem can be more acute in smaller towns with fewer resources and less tolerance for visible signs of a changing community. Puyallup, Wash., with an area population of about 75,000 people, an hour south of Seattle, provides an excellent example. In effect, the city has made it illegal to be homeless within the city limits through a combination of camping and trespassing policies that outlaw living in public.

Moreover, the city enforces those laws in a way that sends a clear message to unhoused people in the city: "We have no place for you." "You don't belong here." "Go away." As a result, these people have been forced to leave town or hide from public view, often in traumatic and very unhealthy conditions, simply to find a place to sleep.

Worse yet, Puyallup has often challenged the few local church-supported homeless services and has even blamed the faith-based service community for the city's worsening homeless crisis. This inhumane and ineffective response to homelessness earned Puyallup the dubious distinction of being named to the Hall of Shame in the Law Center's 2016 national report on the growing criminalization of homelessness, "Housing Not Handcuffs."

The 9th Circuit Court ruled that it is unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment to criminalize homelessness.

Using the power of law

This cruel treatment and banishment of destitute people is a significant civil and human rights issue that begs resolution in law. In 2015, Puyallup homeless advocates decided to use the law to force the city to begin treating homeless people with some dignity. Area city attorneys were convened for two meetings where they were advised that homeless people are part of our common humanity and therefore have common civil and human rights. A seminar was staged in the city park to educate the public regarding real solutions to local homelessness.

Following the seminar, six members of Puyallup's faith-based service provider community protested Puyallup's policies by sleeping in the city park. While the protesters were arguably engaged in expressive conduct protected under the First Amendment, they were arrested for violation of the city's sleeping ban and sentenced to community service and probation. This protest led to additional legal action, including a federal lawsuit filed on behalf of six homeless people who—despite having no other place to go—were kicked out of the brushy areas where they were living and had their few belongings trashed in the process.

Members of Puyallup's faith community also fought back against the city's assault on its homeless drop-in center ministry, which the city claimed generates public health and safety issues. Advocates used the power of the law to keep this Christian ministry from being shut down by the city by arguing that Puyallup illegally infringed upon its free religious exercise.

Legal arguments of this type have a long history of success. In Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church v. City of New York, for example, a church successfully prevented New York from dispersing homeless people who were invited to sleep on church property because the church's use of its own property was found to be a protected religious activity. Similarly, in Big Hart Ministries Assn. Inc. v. City of Dallas, a religious ministry successfully challenged the enforcement of a Dallas ordinance restricting food sharing with poor and homeless people under the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Indeed, legal protections of religious expression are robust, positioning members of the faith community as excellent advocates for people whose rights are too often ignored.

'Woe to those ...'

For Christians, the life of each homeless person is sacred. Each person is unique and innately precious, deserving of respect and basic resources that allow for healthy and safe living. God has created an earthly home for all of us, a place to dwell, belong, and do homemaking.

In the Hebrew Bible, social legislation was established to prevent poverty and homelessness, stop concentrated land ownership and monopolies, and allow people who had lost their land or housing to have it returned. When injustice was sanctioned by government, Isaiah could cry out "woe to those who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, who turn aside the needy from justice and rob the poor of my people of their right" (Isaiah 10:1, 2). Looking at the homeless population, Isaiah denounced unjust housing practices that left people without shelter and even suggested that the homeless poor could be brought into people's homes (Isaiah 58:3-7). At one point, Isaiah envisioned a city where all

Andrey Kvyatkovskiy

Police arrest a homeless man in Portland, Ore., where 50 percent of all arrests last year were of homeless people.

housing issues were addressed and everyone was housed (Isaiah 65).

Following Isaiah, Jesus sided with the often indebted and landless peasant population and called out the rich and powerful who controlled most of the resources, leaving the poor without enough to meet basic human needs (Luke 6:24). Jesus told stories of dire consequences for rich people blindly walking by beggars (Luke 16:19-31) or building bigger barns when poor people were hungry and homeless (Luke 12:16-21). Every person should have enough economic opportunity so that he or she can earn a sustainable living and be a respected, integrated participant in community life.

We have a God who lives with our vulnerable neighbors in the bushes and under bridges and is in an incarnate bonded state with those who suffer (Matthew 25:31-46). It is this divine presence that generates new possibilities in the darkest, most shameful areas of our common life. Our God is in solidarity both with the homeless advocate who struggles to achieve liberating partnership with the destitute and the person who is homeless, hoping to receive help as a gift from God.

Our confidence in God's incarnational movement in the shadows of our community comes from the resurrection victory of Jesus and allows both the homeless advocate and the person who is homeless an inexplicable joy in the face of suffering. To experience God's presence is to be apprehended by divine grace that generates hope, levels the playing field for advocate and destitute alike, joins people together, and sets people on a path toward real solutions for unhoused people.

Professor David Hollenbach, in his book *Claims in Conflict*, has suggested that when there are competing claims in a society between haves and have-nots, housed or unhoused, three principles apply: 1) The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich. 2) The freedom of the dominated takes priority over the liberty of the powerful. 3) The participation of marginalized groups takes priority over the preservation of an order that excludes them. God has a preferential option for the poor such that a key marker of how well a community is functioning is how the poor are being treated.

Since legal protections of religious expression are robust, people of faith can be excellent advocates for those without homes.

Doing the work of justice

We can do better throughout the nation. To start, we must move toward systemic reform by actively opposing policies that punish people for living outside when they have no choice in the matter. City councils need to be aware that people with no shelter alternatives cannot be arrested, ticketed, or threatened with arrest simply for being in a public space. City councils must be challenged to repeal bans on living and sheltering outside or in cars until access to adequate housing and shelter has been obtained. The destruction of homeless people's tents and belongings, or impounding of their vehicles, must be documented and protested.

Homeless advocates can serve as witnesses or parties in lawsuits challenging the criminalization of homelessness as unconstitutionally cruel or otherwise illegal under mounting court precedent. Christians can work with civil and human rights attorneys to connect unhoused people with legal advocates who can help them protect their rights. Local government and the community at large can be assisted in identifying places where unsheltered neighbors can safely and lawfully exist, such as tiny home villages or temporary outdoor encampments.

For 17 years, churches in Puyallup have provided many charitable services to our most vulnerable neighbors in the form of food, clothing, sleeping bag and tent distribution, mail services, a weeklong first-response motel ministry for homeless families, sanctuary during the five coldest months for homeless adults, and a drop-in center providing a variety of resources during the day. Nonprofits and churches have shown remarkable ecumenical collaboration in their work to relieve the misery experienced by this vulnerable group.

After many attempts to provide public education and present the city with strategic plans to resolve homelessness, advocates are now using the law to empower people without shelter. This increased awareness can lead toward affordable housing development and end the displacement of unhoused people from the community.

While charity motivates us to care for the well-being of those unhoused, it is the work of justice to right the systemic wrongs that target poor and homeless people for unfair treatment under the law. Our churches should make social policy change and legal advocacy ministry for people without homes as important as sharing food and supplies with our neighbors on the street. ■

Tristia Bauman *is senior attorney with the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.* ***Ted Brackman*** *is a homeless advocate and part of Pastoral Therapy Associates in Puyallup, Wash. The authors' religious views expressed here don't necessarily reflect those of their organizations.*

By Da'Shawn Mosley

Can This Planet Be **Saved?**

A film on faith in a time of climate crisis.

IN OCTOBER, *The New York Times* published an article that, despite its dire implications, seemed to wash away in the rapid news cycle. It described how, according to the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's population will see major consequences, as early as 2040, from its mistreatment of the planet. More droughts, more wildfires, more poverty, and higher temperatures—in only 22 years. When that time comes, when nature begins to resemble Hell, how will we have to live?

Emmy-nominated documentary filmmaker David Conover has been thinking about this question for 12 years. "I was a parent of two young kids," Conover told me about the moment when he began to ruminate on creation care, "and was trying to understand the world they were growing into: pollution, severe weather with fires, flooding, droughts, struggles with realities that weren't that apparent even a generation ago.

"There have been many films made about those things, how we know that they're happening, what's causing them, and so on. But there haven't been any films about people and their experience of exploring the very tough question of how to live right today in this climate."

Conover's wrestling with how to live a moral life during a time of environmental hardship

From the film *Behold the Earth*

Inside CultureWatch

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Danny Duncan Collum on Paul Simon's wrong turn

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Christina Colón reviews *She Preached the Word*

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Anne Colamosca reviews *Why Religion?*

has culminated in the production and release of his newest documentary, *Behold the Earth*, which explores contemporary Christianity's relationship with creation care.

Far from inactive

Behold the Earth is a surprise. Often, films about environmental advocacy solely center the wisdom of middle-age and older white males and forget the voices of women, people of color, and younger generations. But Conover fashioned his film against this norm, interviewing Ben Lowe, founder of Young Evangelicals for Climate Action and a biracial man of Asian-American descent, and Corina Newsome, an African-American biologist and animal keeper at the Nashville Zoo.

"They brought a justice angle to the film," said Conover about Lowe and Newsome. "Because they belong to marginalized communities, they really understand the difficulties of places that have been compromised by environmental threats and the difficulties of the lives of inhabitants of those places."

In *Behold the Earth*, Newsome teams up with her cousin, who pastors an African-American church, to introduce his congregation to wildlife and creation care. Newsome speaks powerfully about how she had limited wildlife and greenery around her when she was growing up in Philadelphia's inner city.

> "I'm hoping this film will be part of a larger reset of how we're carrying out our responsibility to be stewards."

Conover was also strongly impacted by Lowe mentioning that he had never heard a sermon preached on caring for creation and that some Christians in his generation left the church because they didn't think the church cared about concerns God had placed on their hearts, such as the health of the environment.

"It was really important to get Ben and Corina's perspectives in the film," said Conover. "Without them, the film would have been much less." Their appearances in *Behold the Earth*—paired alongside those of Cal DeWitt, Katharine Hayhoe, the late Theo Colborn, and two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner E.O. Wilson—form a modern evaluation of creation care that's much needed in an era of catastrophic hurricanes and a sitting U.S. president who has pulled the nation out of a global agreement to lower fossil fuel emissions.

"I think the film could engage people who are distrustful of science and have been led to believe that their faith is at odds with the science of the day," said Conover, who grew up in a Congregationalist church tradition. "When I decided to make the film, I knew there were people out there who were living lives of faith and were also scientists contributing to society."

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New & Noteworthy

Neneh Cherry

In the Key of Policy

Neneh Cherry's effortless vocals and impressionistic lyrics reverberate with honesty in her fifth album, the personal and provocative *Broken Politics*. Complex, multilayered instrumentals featuring harp, brass, and steel drum form an unexpected backdrop for songs about refugees, women's rights, and gun violence. Small Supersound/Awal Recordings

Protest 101

How to Read a Protest: The Art of Organizing and Resistance explores the evolution of mass demonstrations in America since the 1963 March on Washington. Drawing on 30-plus years as a grassroots organizer, L.A. Kauffman sheds new light on how and why protests work. University of California Press

A Public Address

At a time when some question the pope's integrity, Wim Wenders' latest documentary allows Pope Francis to speak for himself on several critical issues—including sexual abuse. *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word* uses original interviews and footage for unprecedented access to the influential faith leader. Focus Features

The Sight of Justice

Revive Us Again: Vision and Action in Moral Organizing—by William J. Barber II, Rick Lowery, and Liz Theoharis—is a powerful work of intersectional protest. With essays from other contemporary activists as well, the book engages a range of current justice issues. Beacon Press

BY DANNY DUNCAN COLLUM

Graceless in *Graceland*

Jason Reed/Reuters

Paul Simon performs with members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo at a 2007 reunion in Washington, D.C.

ON SEPT. 22, 2018, Paul Simon took to an outdoor stage in his native borough of Queens, N.Y., for the last show of his aptly named "Homeward Bound" farewell tour. After 52 years near the top of the music business, Simon was finally ready to get off the bus for good. Simon's not taking a vow of musical silence, but he does say that he has no plans for further work.

So, let's take the man at his word and assume that this could be a good time to assess what the singer-songwriter has meant to his audiences, his country, and, in the end, the great march of human culture.

That may sound a little grandiose for a guy who started as a hack songwriter in the Brill Building pop factory and made his first record (with Art Garfunkel, of course) under the name "Tom and Jerry." But after the whole "The Sound of Silence," folk-rock thing passed, Simon went on a long, long run in which he often elevated the American pop song to the level of high art. And, from "America," dropped into the maelstrom of 1968, to the Nixon era's "American Tune," to "Wristband" in the age of Trump, he occasionally even captured the spirit of his age in a memorable, hummable verse, chorus, and bridge.

Paul Simon's album *Graceland* is one of the most morally compromised works of the late 20th century.

In brief, the guy's a genius. And, though he started in the era when singer-songwriters were supposed to be the new poets, his real genius turned out to be musical: those infectious tunes and, from the mid-'70s on, those propulsive rhythmic arrangements.

Which brings us to *Graceland* (1986), the towering monument in the middle of Simon's long career. *Graceland*'s fusion of American pop and African roots takes the listener on a musical joyride that marks the apex of Simon's achievement. Its appeal will probably last forever, with subsequent generations discovering and rediscovering it, the way they do with the Beatles. I know my kids and their peers came to it via its influence on Vampire Weekend. That's bound to keep happening.

And there lies the problem in assessing Simon's cultural legacy, because *Graceland*, for all its musical brilliance, is also one of the most morally compromised works of the late 20th century. Simon recorded the album in the apartheid state of South Africa, in knowing defiance of the U.N. cultural boycott of the nation. He paid his black South African collaborators very well and brought their work before a global audience, but the boycott was important. More important than the artistic impulses or personal generosity of any one man. Isolating the apartheid regime was an essential part of the strategy that led to the regime's downfall. And isolation meant isolation, with no exceptions for good intentions.

Simon knew all this when he did it. Before going to South Africa, he checked with singer and activist Harry Belafonte, who told him he needed to ask the African National Congress. Simon deliberately went ahead without doing this.

During those same years in the mid-'80s, E Street Band guitarist Steven Van Zandt was devoting most of his time to organizing musicians and other artists in support of the anti-apartheid boycott. According to Van Zandt, when he confronted Simon about *Graceland*, the singer said, "What are you doing defending this guy Mandela? He's obviously a communist. My friend Henry Kissinger told me about where all of the money's coming from."

So, there we have it. At a crucial moment, history placed before Simon a clear and crucial choice between solidarity and self-fulfillment, and with eyes wide open, he made the wrong choice. That doesn't erase his achievements as an artist or, for that matter, his good works before or since. But going forward the story of Simon's choice must be retold whenever and wherever the *Graceland* music is heard. ■

Danny Duncan Collum *teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel* White Boy.

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To fund the production of *Behold the Earth*, Conover managed to raise money from people who belong to faith communities and people who don't—showing that the religious movement for Earth's preservation is far from inactive.

"I'm hoping this film will be part of a larger reset of how we're carrying out our responsibility to be stewards," said Conover. "But even though it's a reset, we really need to look back at our oldest, most enduring words, images, parables, books, and music."

The revival of creation care

This is where the folk musicians come in: Tim Eriksen, who contributed to the music of the Oscar-winning film *Cold Mountain* and pianist Omar Sosa's Grammy-nominated album *Across the Divide*; four-time Grammy winner Dirk Powell and his daughters Sophie and Amelia; and Grammy winner Rhiannon Giddens, who was awarded a 2017 MacArthur "genius" grant and is a founding member of the string band Carolina Chocolate Drops. Throughout *Behold the Earth*, all five incredible musicians perform outdoors, singing praises in nature.

"We took some big risks with music," Conover told me. "In a 60-minute film, at least a third of it is just music. Dirk introduced me to Tim, and Tim said to me, 'You know there's this great tradition of singing songs of praise outdoors?' It was very popular, as part of the revival movements in the Northeast—in particular, in the mid-to-late 1800s—and several thousand people would get together in these big open fields, on a spring or summer weekend, and just sing together songs of praise. So, he told me about *American Vocalist*, a hymn book, and I hunted it down, and there were a bunch of songs we drew from it, as well as adaptations of classics like 'Amazing Grace.' The music adds a huge dimension to the film: It gives it a liturgical structure.

"And the opportunity to make six music videos, at the same time that I was making a documentary, was awesome."

Part of the wonder and power of great works of art is that they speak the language of emotion, never examining the concepts and theories of our lives without

ONFILM

BY GARETH HIGGINS

From *Bad Times at the El Royale*

PAST, PRESENT, **FUTURE**

WHEN A FILM seems ahead of its time, it's because its artists are like time travelers, bringing information from the future to illuminate our present. Ideas that lack mainstream consensus (for instance, restorative justice, gift economies, and the flourishing of previously silenced voices in central leadership roles) can manifest in filmmakers' storytelling as though they are already reality. We leave the theater wishing the world was more like what we were shown. In the future, we may watch the same film and remember how strange it was when the world was different.

Two recent movies that are this kind of prophetic couldn't be more different from each other in tone but have the same intent: to say something truthful about women who suffer.

Lizzie—a thoughtful, painful interpretation of the 19th-century Borden murders—is about the past but foretells the future because it takes killing far more seriously than almost any other film. It's honest about why someone might feel driven to kill, the horror of the deed itself, and the costs, honoring both the victims and the torturous circumstances in which they placed their daughter—who killed them. It doesn't like what Lizzie did, nor does it like what was done to her first. But what it asks of the audience is: Who are you in this story? What would you do?

Bad Times at the El Royale mashes up the big house whodunnit—think *A Murder Is Announced* or *Clue*—with Vietnam War trauma, the evolution of power dynamics between men and women, and the astonishing transformation that's possible when aggression is met with the truth rather than more violence. Strangers, whose respective purposes are mysterious, assemble in a hotel on a red-blue state line: These people include a priest with memory problems (played by Jeff Bridges, who is easing into elderhood, entering the latest phase of one of the most diverse, thoughtful, and entertaining American acting careers), a bellhop (portrayed by Lewis Pullman, one of this film's breakout stars), a singer (acted by Cynthia Erivo, the other breakout star, in a magnificent performance that transfixes because of her music and the way she speaks the movie's—as well as the current cultural moment's—most profound words). The plot's a tease, and a bit brutal, but saying more would spoil a great surprise. *Bad Times at the El Royale* is far deeper than the genres it apes. It uses entertainment to make us consider nothing less than the demons in America's self-perception, the sins of the past, and the possibility of something much, much better ahead—for which we need to hold on. It's coming. ■

***Gareth Higgins** is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.*

first examining our connections with each other. Watching the performances of Eriksen, the Powells, and Giddens reminded me of an element of creation care that's often forgotten: When we care for the environment, we also care for each other—one of the Bible's most poignant and important instructions.

"Waterbound on a stranger's shore," Dirk Powell sings as footage of devastating flooding appears onscreen. "River rising to my door. Carried my home to the field below. I'm waterbound, nowhere to go."

Filmmaker David Conover

Conover is waterbound, too. His next project—now that *Behold the Earth* has been screened at film festivals and is available online—is an art installation about seashells.

"The ocean has always really spoken to me," he said, "and the installation is an opportunity to take something simple—a shell—and really look at it. So we're going to be filming seashells and showing them on four screens to examine the beauty of their form."

The world is busy and often chaotic, but somehow Conover has found time to take the instruction of the title of his latest film to heart. It's time for all of us to do the same. ■

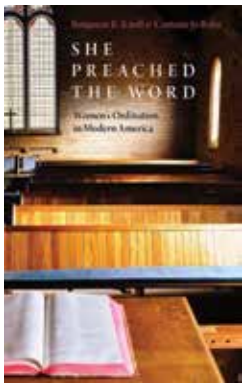
***Da'Shawn Mosley** is assistant editor of* Sojourners *magazine.*

Reviewed by Christina Colón

THE POWER OF THE **PULPIT**

***She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America,* by Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin. Oxford University Press.**

WHEN I WAS in college, I asked one of my faith leaders at the time why no women were in positions of authority in that ministry. He said that the male leaders' wives were always available to serve as mentors. Besides, he added, if they hired a woman, she would just get married and quit to raise a family.



I left, I fumed, and then I read Sarah Bessey's *Jesus Feminist*, which told me that not only could women serve as pastors and leaders in the church, but that Jesus wanted them to.

If that were so, I wondered, why had I encountered so few female faith leaders?

Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin have provided an answer. In *She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America,* Knoll and Bolin examine why women still make up just 15 percent of congregational clergy.

Knoll, a professor of politics at Centre College, and Bolin, a political science graduate student at Georgetown University, observed that many of the debates surrounding female ordination are drawn from generalizations formed from personal experiences and anecdotal examples. What was missing, Knoll and Bolin concluded, was "systematic, comprehensive, and generalizable empirical evidence."

Knoll and Bolin began their research with the following questions: Who supports women's ordination in their congregations and why? What effect do female pastors, priests, rabbis, and other leaders have on their congregants?

Knoll and Bolin collected data through a nationally representative telephone/internet public opinion survey and conducted face-to-face interviews with people in the pews and in the pulpits. They focused on how women's presence in the pulpit—or lack thereof—and the views congregants hold about female ordination impact women in all positions of leadership in American society.

Lack of female leadership is an interesting phenomenon, one that leaves more questions than answers, especially given the impact female religious leaders have on the life trajectories of the young women in their congregations. Knoll and Bolin's data reveals that women who grow up with a female religious leader show "higher levels of both personal and economic empowerment" as adults—to the extent that the "gender gap on these two outcomes disappears entirely." Moreover, "influential religious leaders in a girl's youth are associated with increased levels of educational attainment, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and even more gracious views of God as adults." The presence of female clergy had no impact on men's empowerment, which remained high with either male or female clergy.

While congregants cited scripture and belief orthodoxy as reasons why women should not be clergy, Knoll and Bolin found that congregational context also has some impact. "Even highly religious and theologically traditionalist folks will get behind female ordination when they attend congregations whose policies allow for it," Knoll and Bolin write. In other words, congregants tend to follow their congregation's lead.

> Women who grow up with a female religious leader show "higher levels of both personal and economic empowerment" as adults.

Church attendance is affected by those decisions, as more people of faith are paying attention to who's in the pulpit and serving in church leadership. Knoll and Bolin

observed that "levels of attendances and other religious behaviors are slightly *higher* in congregations that ordain women." U.S. congregations should take note, as overall rates of attendance at religious services have plummeted over the years, especially among millennials and political progressives. In fact, 43 percent of millennials said they would be more likely to attend church if their congregation permitted women to serve as the leader.

In their conclusion, Knoll and Bolin provide suggestions for congregations in light of their findings. They emphasize that switching from male-dominant to female-dominant leadership is not the answer. Rather, the best results come from equalizing gender leadership—"inviting women to serve as a congregation's principal leader as often as men and by making sure that the lay ministry positions are shared evenly between men and women."

For many young women, the glass ceiling feels increasingly impossible to crack. *She Preached the Word* reveals that one of the best ways to empower women today is to give them the pulpit. As Knoll and Bolin conclude, "gender equality in religious congregational leadership is a necessary precondition for gender equality in American society at large." ■

***Christina Colón** is assistant web editor at Sojourners.*

Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

A SCHOLAR'S PATH OF LOSS AND **BELIEF**

***Why Religion? A Personal Story,* by Elaine Pagels. Ecco.**

FORTY YEARS AGO, in 1979, Princeton University professor Elaine Pagels won the National Book Award for her groundbreaking (and best-selling) first major nonacademic book, *The Gnostic Gospels*. In it, Pagels lucidly described the history of a little-known early Christian sect, the Gnostics, who believed everyone had a "divine spark" within them and that with

EXCERPT

CAPITALISM'S **HEAVEN AND HELL**

FINANCE-DOMINATED capitalism uses a variety of institutional means to single out individuals and render them accountable for their own fortunes, the bearers of either praise or blame. Economic success or failure becomes one's individual responsibility, revelatory of who one is as a person. Moralized evaluation of individual success or failure figured prominently in the old Protestant work ethic and now reappears in exaggerated form within a finance-dominated work ethic.

Economic success or failure in that old religious ethic was deemed indicative of one's fundamental individual character—reflective, that is, of the particular standing before God that defined one in religious terms, success being a mark of election to salvation, failure a sign of exclusion. Hoping to confirm one's salvation by the character of one's economic activity, one worked hard as capitalism demanded—to gain economic success and in that way distinguish oneself from others, not just economically but religiously.

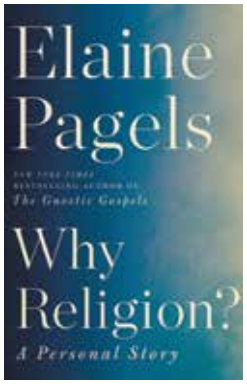
This way of relating to oneself and one's economic fortunes has now been shorn of the religious support it required in capitalism's early days. Trying to distinguish oneself economically from the vast majority of those less fortunate within finance-dominated capitalism has become highly motivating in its own right, given simply the economic stakes involved. The economically elite—the economic elect, one might say—are very few, and the difference between the economic top and bottom can be extreme, amounting to a kind of economic heaven in one case (more money than any one individual could possibly spend apart from an interest in space travel) and damnation in the other (drudgery in exchange for low pay at best, along with a life of constant worry).

Within finance-dominated capitalism, an individualizing moralism with respect to oneself presupposes and implies specific ways of relating to others. For example, relating to oneself in a moralizing fashion is fomented by the way finance-dominated capitalism structures relations with others in competitive, winner-take-all markets. And in so relating to oneself, one shores up or reinforces that very same competitive structuring of human relationships.

Because it forms not just individual persons but their relationships, this aspect of the new spirit of capitalism works to set up a whole social world. This is the world, I hope to show, Christians have reason to oppose. How Christianity brings together relations to oneself with relations to others establishes an entirely different, other world that fundamentally calls this one into question. ■

From Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism, *by Kathryn Tanner, published by Yale University Press (January 2019). Reproduced by permission.*

some contemplation everyone could make their own connection to God, a belief that was abhorred by more orthodox Christians. In 367 C.E., Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, ordered monks in Egypt to reject "illegitimate and secret books," including Gnostic writings.



What makes Pagels' latest book, *Why Religion?: A Personal Story,* impossible to put down is the way she interweaves her now 50-year study of the Gnostics with her own personal story. Over the years, she has described the profound losses—one year apart in the late 1980s—in her own life. First, the death of her 6-year-old son, Mark, from a rare pulmonary disease. Second, the death of her husband, Heinz, who fell into a 1,300-foot ravine while hiking in Colorado. Pagels' newest account is much more detailed and painful than earlier summaries, stunningly raw, almost as though writing about recent events.

Pagels' work has stimulated a continued curiosity about the Gnostics and the roots of Christianity.

The entire ordeal made Pagels feel "as though she was being burned alive." She had been raised as a Protestant, but her father, a biology professor at Stanford, thought religion passé. To get through these times, Pagels relied on friends, two newly adopted children, Trappist priest Thomas Keating (a teacher of contemplative practices, including centering prayer), and the rituals of a nearby Episcopal church.

But her academic work on the Gnostics also kept her going emotionally. She was captivated by them, although other scholars of early Christianity often would refer to Gnostic texts as "rubbish."

"I was surprised to find in some of them unexpected spiritual power," Pagels wrote in her other best-selling book, *Beyond Belief*, citing this from the Gospel of Thomas: "Jesus said: 'If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.'" Pagels concludes, "The strength of this saying is that it does not tell us to believe but challenges us to discover what lies hidden within ourselves."

The Gnostic writings were the most important trove of early Christian texts ever found, apart from the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1945 an illiterate Arab camel driver, Muhammad Ali, stopped in the desert near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi to dig up some fertilizer for his family's garden and discovered a six-foot-high, reddish earthen jar. Inside were 52 ancient Gnostic texts. They would remain on the Egyptian black market for some years before landing in Cairo's Coptic Museum, whose scholars sent copies of the texts to academics around the world. In 1965, Pagels was a young, untested scholar (in a field with very few women), just beginning her doctoral work in religion at Harvard. She was assigned to begin translating the texts since she had been studying Coptic.

Pagels found in these texts evidence of early Christian practices with radical implications for the church. Among the followers of the Gnostic teacher Valentinus, Pagels writes, "women were considered equal to men; some were revered as prophets; others acted as teachers, traveling evangelists, healers, priests, perhaps even bishops."

What, one may ask, were the odds that a young feminist scholar would encounter sacred papyrus texts likely buried by Coptic monks rebelling against Athanasius' edict, much less eventually emerge with a best-selling book on the topic? Indeed, Pagels' work has stimulated a continued curiosity about the Gnostics and the roots of Christianity.

"Why not look elsewhere and abandon Christianity?" some people would counsel Pagels. Her answer, "I'd done that, and might never have returned for a deeper look had it never been for the secret gospels." ■

***Anne Colamosca** is a former staff writer at* Business Week *and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.*

Silicon Valley's Original Sin

Continued from Page 21

contain all our contradictions: good and bad, gifts and failings, love and hate. Our brokenness gets transmuted into new life. The logic of sacrament meets the logic of resurrection.

This means that when we do soul work, when we take seriously the hard labor of facing up to the dark parts of ourselves, our goal isn't to deny the shadow—as if it weren't a real part of our experiences—or to simply turn darkness into light. It's to turn darkness into growth in love.

Real abundance, whatever Silicon Valley may believe, incorporates the shadow. To believe otherwise is to be Gnostic, not Christian. It's to be morally unrealistic. And the failure to face up to reality is where danger really lies.

GLIMMERS OF HOPE

There are glimmers of hope. There is a cohort of vocal technologists in the Valley who no longer think you can make powerful technologies, improve humanity, and make piles of money without tradeoffs. Google employees forced the company to refuse defense contracts for autonomous weapons and walked out in protest of sexual harassment.

That may seem small, but it provides an opening, an exit toward a different theological possibility: namely, that Silicon Valley, like the rest of us, has a shadow. And, like the rest of us, it needs to take work on that shadow as a key part of the life of innovation. After all, the root of innovation, *innovare*, means to change or renew.

Of course, it's not only about Silicon Valley, as if the rest of us are off the hook. When Steve Jobs offered us good news, we believed. The iPhone, in its elegant tactility, may have captured our attention and enmeshed us into its networked world. But part of us wanted to be bewitched. Refusing that spell may mean simply spending more time unplugged. But it may also mean keeping a lookout for places where, collectively, we keep hoping technology will save us. We need to stop bowing our heads to these strange new gods.

Today, the limits of innovation without shadow are on full display. What remains to be seen is where a little work on our shadow might yet take us. ■

***Gaymon Bennett** is a professor of religion, science, and technology at Arizona State University.*

BY BILL McKIBBEN

Fifteen-year-old Greta Thunberg on "school strike for climate" in Sweden

Jessica Gow

Rebelling Against Extinction

LEADERSHIP COMES from unlikely places—Christians know that better, perhaps, than anyone else. So as we face the savage crisis of climate change, a crisis made far worse by our inaction, it is very good news that a 15-year-old autistic Swedish girl has shown the rest of us new directions in this battle.

When school began in the fall, Greta Thunberg decided not to go. Inspired in part by the Parkland students and their school walkouts over gun violence, she sat down on the steps of the Swedish parliament in Stockholm every morning and stayed there the entire school day. Every day. Her argument, at its core, was that if the country's politicians couldn't be bothered to fix climate change, there was no real reason for her to be studying, since the world she would inherit would be so fatally compromised.

'All we need to do is wake up and change.'

Her protest drew widespread attention in Sweden, in part because her father is a well-known actor and her mother a famous opera singer (albeit one who has given up her international performing career, persuaded by her daughter that flying to concerts was a waste of carbon). Others noticed too. She came to Finland this fall to address the largest climate rally in Helsinki history, and then to London for the launch of a civil disobedience movement called Extinction Rebellion.

Part of her appeal is her completely straightforward and no-nonsense take on our predicament. "Some people say that we should study to become climate scientists so that we can 'solve the climate crisis,'" she said recently. "But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we need to do is to wake up and change." Which is essentially true. The engineers have brought down the price of solar and wind power to the point where there is no logical reason not to be deploying them at rapid pace; only inertia, and the illogical power of the fossil fuel industry, keep us from making progress.

It's apparent that Thunberg's autism has played some role in her clarity. "I see the world a bit different, from another perspective," she told *New Yorker* reporter Masha Gessen. "I have a special interest. It's very common that people on the autism spectrum have a special interest."

It also means she's not very good at the compromises most of us make: Since she started focusing on climate change at the age of 9, she told Gessen, she's stopped eating meat, stopped buying anything that she doesn't consider necessary. She was, obviously, willing to part with her school friends, though since the Swedish parliamentary elections she has returned to class four days a week, saving Fridays for her protest.

I think we are extraordinarily lucky to have Greta Thunberg among us at this moment. Clearly our leaders have done little, if anything, despite plenty of warning from scientists. The rest of us have not roused ourselves sufficiently to force their hand. God works in mysterious ways, and if it takes a child to lead us, then so be it. ■

Bill McKibben, *founder of 350.org, is the author most recently of* Radio Free Vermont: A Fable of Resistance.

BY MARTIN L. SMITH

More Than You Can Imagine

POWERFUL CLAIMS IN SCRIPTURE about the gospel are clothed in thought forms so archaic that most preachers shy away from them. The letter to the Ephesians has much to teach us this month, but what are we to make of the claim that we are called to ensure that "through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (3:10)?

We moderns assume that evangelism targets human individuals, but the New Testament writers insist that the revolutionary message is addressed to cosmic forces that exert control over our culture and our political institutions, giving them notice that God's saving intervention in Christ is more than a match for their malign influence. These are the "rulers and authorities" that the writer to the Colossians insists were disarmed by Christ's death on the cross, where he "made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it" (2:15). Let us do the hard work of translating these claims into terms that can apply to our own work of evangelism. We may no longer believe in actual heavenly entities that need to be deposed by the good news, but we must bring the gospel to bear on our contemporary equivalents. Don't we talk glibly about "the markets"—as if they were an impersonal force we can do nothing about? But the gospel debunks this evasion of responsibility about how human beings distribute the good things of the earth.

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[JANUARY 6]

Uncontrollable Mystery

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

AS WE LET MATTHEW beckon us across the dirt floor of the house in Bethlehem to look over the shoulders of the Magi and gaze at Mary's newborn, what is our reaction? I find myself reciting Yeats' haunting poem "The Magi." The poet sees in his mind's eye the astrologers from the east, now very aged, looming up in the sky, apparently on a quest to experience again their encounter with the infant Jesus and discover what it really meant. Their motive for this mystic time travel is bafflement at Jesus' absurd death on the cross: "being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied." So they seek again a vision of the infant, "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor." This haunting last line was judged by novelist E.M. Forster to be "the most deep and terrible yet written on the Nativity."

We are not surprised by the poet's nor the Magi's lack of satisfaction with "Calvary's turbulence." Those who identify power with control can react to the revelation of what Paul calls the "foolishness" and "weakness" of God on the cross only with puzzlement and disgust. Ancient astrology, the Magi's field of expertise, was based on the myth that human destiny is under the control of supernatural astral forces. To claw back some power for ourselves, we must constantly deploy countermeasures, manipulating these powers through magical techniques. These reassure us that we have some control after all. But the embodiment of God in an utterly vulnerable human infant, who ultimately surrenders his life as the victim of the forces of law, order, and power, subverts the entire myth. The paradoxical revelation that begins to shine out from the filthy stable floor is that the being of God as vulnerable, nonviolent, and self-giving love is the authentically uncontrollable mystery that cannot be parried, manipulated, or defeated. Herod lashes out to fend off that mystery through atrocious but futile violence. The Magi slip away moved, even joyful, but did they guess at the revolution, of which "the bestial floor" is ground zero?

[JANUARY 13]

Holy Spirit Twist

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF the Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus after his baptism has a twist to it. Mark and Matthew have the Spirit descending "*like* a dove," suggesting a gentle swooshing. But Luke strangely insists that the Spirit descended upon Jesus "in *bodily form* like a dove." A real dove here!

What are we to make of this? In fact, this is a highly political statement, a provocative judgment on regimes based on violence, such as the Roman Empire. Take our word "inauguration," meaning a ceremonial initiation into a position of authority. It comes from the Latin word *augur*. In Roman times, augurs were state officials expert at predicting the future by interpreting patterns of bird flight at political events. If certain birds of ill omen appeared, the augurs pronounced that the gods were vetoing the candidate. But if auspicious birds flew in, that meant the gods were giving the go-ahead. So it was that every Roman emperor from Augustus onward claimed to have been singled out, when power was shifting, by the appearance of an eagle, the bird associated with Jupiter, the supreme god.

Luke's readers would have gasped at the audacity of his version of Jesus' baptism. It is Jesus' inauguration as supreme regent of God. But instead of a raptor, the eagle representing imperial dominance, it is the Spirit as dove who appears. In the ancient world the dove was the universally recognized symbol of romantic love, nurture, tenderness, care, vulnerability, simplicity, and innocence. Luke's original readers would have thrilled at the daring contrast—and been reminded of the radical political implications of their own baptism. Baptism was their own bold commitment to the divine dove, the life of vulnerable love in union with the crucified and Risen One, and a decisive pulling out from under the sway of the eagle and all it stood for—coercive power and privilege. As for us, baptized under the sign of the dove, the fact that the eagle is America's national symbol calls to mind the shadow side of our identity as the most powerful nation on the earth.

[JANUARY 20]

Divine Excess

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

IN PAUL'S FIRST letter to the Corinthians, he tackles their misconceptions about the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Leaders were whipping up ecstatic worship experiences and, in the excitement, prophets had evidently been known to bark out "Jesus be cursed!" The worship of the Lord was leading some to suppose that the historical Jesus had been a phase that was irrelevant now to life in the Spirit. Jesus' inconvenient and radical moral teaching would be a drag now on the license the Corinthians felt the Spirit was giving them. It seems strange to us, but is it really? Time and again in Christian history, the actual teaching of Jesus has been disregarded and stepped over, and the Spirit's freedom and inspiration used to justify permission for all sorts of evasions and practices that conflict with the new ethics of God's reign that the Jesus of history proclaimed.

The reading from Isaiah revels in erotic, bridal imagery for the relationship between God and ourselves, as God's beloved: "So shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (62:5). How often do we hear sermons inspired by this exploration of intimacy with God as erotic, in the deepest meaning of that word? Seldom! The historic bias against sexuality in post-Reformation Western Christianity continues to repress our imaginations, dry out our worship, and keep our prayer shallow.

The bias against sexuality continues to keep our prayer shallow.

John's story of Jesus at the wedding at Cana is a probing challenge to our pinched and utilitarian ideas about the Holy One. Jesus' miracle produces a fantastic quantity of the finest wine—nearly 150 gallons—that promises to make the country celebration exhilarating indeed! Imagery of excess, of divine surplus and overflow, is essential for the proclamation of God's reign. Christ comes not merely to address a lack in us or to meet our so-called "needs." The good news is of a divine excess bound to surpass "abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

[JANUARY 27]

'Joy-Giving Grief'

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

THE WRITINGS OF early Christian monks are a treasure house of wisdom. One particularly astute expression used by the desert fathers and mothers is "joy-giving grief." It evokes the gospel stories where repentance is never self-lacerating remorse but a wonderful opening to the joy of God whenever human beings expose their brokenness to divine healing. In Nehemiah, we see the wise leader guiding the people through their grief at realizing how far they had wandered off track in their faithfulness to God's Torah, to break through to joy at the opportunity to begin again, living from its wisdom and fruitfulness. "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10). The sign of this joy will be a turning toward one another in mutual regard and care, so Nehemiah nudges the people to once more assume responsibility for those who have little or nothing and include them in the celebration: "Send portions ... to those for whom nothing is prepared" (8:10).

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he unfolds the imagery of our life as limbs and organs of Christ's body, in which joy in our interwoven dependence on one another is the hallmark of life in the Spirit. In the passage from Luke's gospel, Jesus provocatively identifies himself, after reading from Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue, as the one anointed by the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's amnesty, liberation, and healing. We listen, all too aware that this proclamation will not result in his listeners sharing in "the joy of the Lord" but in the quick secretion of acid resentment in their hearts, which will drive them to attempt to lynch the town's homeboy who has outraged them by claiming to be the Anointed One. ■

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

Hope Stubborn as a Weed

Continued from Page 31

constitutional right to a future not wrecked by climate change. When the court case was filed, the children were between 7 and 18 years old.

Over the past three years, these young people defeated numerous attempts to block the trial by the fossil fuel industry, the Obama administration, and the Trump administration. This is the first time global warming is getting a full hearing in a high court.

In U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken's 2016 ruling on the case, she said, "Exercising my 'reasoned judgment,' I have no doubt that the right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life is fundamental to a free and ordered society ... a stable climate system is quite literally the foundation 'of society, without which there would be neither civilization nor progress.'"

In November, the Supreme Court overruled the Trump administration's most recent attempt to dismiss the case. The trial is proceeding and has become the model for similar cases in 13 other countries.

"It is the greatest of shrubs ..."

As biblical scholar Walter Wink explained: This is how we write the future, this is how history is made: by envisioning new alternative possibilities and acting on them as if they were inevitable.

Reshaping history is a daunting task, especially when the corporate and financial "powers and principalities" oppose our goals. We are living on the hinge of history, the first generation to foresee, and the final generation with an opportunity to forestall, the most catastrophic consequences of climate change.

"And becomes a tree, so that the birds make nests in its branches."

Each of us—and all of us together—must decide what role we will play in the life God has given us. Can we become the generation that answers God's call to restore creation?

We can. We are the mustard seed Jesus spoke of, the tiny seed that has germinated and is becoming a large and sturdy plant. But wait. During Jesus' time, the mustard plant was considered a weed!

We all know what weeds are like. You can't get rid of them. No matter how hard you try, they rise again. Weeds are unstoppable. And so are we. ■

Jim Antal, author of Climate Church, Climate World, *is a denominational leader, climate activist, and public theologian.*

The Key to a Long Life

Ken Davis

TO TAKE MY mind off Ted Cruz being with us for another six years, I've found that repeatedly jabbing a needle into my knee seems to work best. But today I'm thinking of the more comforting world of assisted living, specifically the current residence of my elderly parents. Although I have to be careful using that word "elderly," since I am, ahem, of a certain age myself. And I have my own burden to bear. (Recently, several people remarked that I look like Clint Eastwood, that handsome paragon of Hollywood masculinity. But they weren't talking about Clint Eastwood in his prime, but rather the current Clint Eastwood, who's 88. That hurts.)

My parents reside at a Baptist senior center near Florence, S.C., a town not named after a recent hurricane that bulldozed its way through the South. There wasn't much left, anyway, after Hurricane Matthew came through earlier. (And then there was Michael, another "100-year storm," a phrase that apparently now means "monthly.")

Who knew it was fried foods?

Visiting my parents is always a joy, as well as a jolt. The jolt comes when driving from North Carolina into South Carolina, where the road immediately becomes cracked and rough, registering the difference between a state that responsibly maintains its highways and one that instead puts its money into maintaining the 41st-best health care in the nation, not to mention the 48th-best education. (High fives for Mississippi, which is way up at 46th!) In fairness, South Carolina ranks 12th in gun ownership, so you probably don't want to complain about the roads.

The joy, on the other hand, is in visiting parents who, well into their 90s, still have alert minds and quick wits, a condition I credit to the fact they finally stopped watching Fox News. (Given time, the human brain can eventually flush out the worst of poisons.) Now, they mainly watch old movies, such as westerns featuring a young Clint Eastwood.

Me: "Hey, Dad, people tell me I look like him. What do you think?"

Dad: "Son, you don't look anything *like* that horse."

He's 94, and funnier than me. That hurts.

THEY LOVE their new home, and what's not to love? It's got a coffee lounge, laundry service, fried chicken on Thursdays, and church on Sundays. Not to mention ample heat and air conditioning designed to keep them warm in the winter and "cool" in the summer, which can be quite a shock for visitors. (You don't know what cold is until you visit a senior center in the summer. You were *warned* to bring a sweater.)

And who says they can't set the thermostat how they want? They've earned it. They took what the world aimed at them and ducked. And now they're enjoying the fruits of their longevity, which seems even longer considering the walking pace of most of them. My parents are two of the oldest residents, but they're among the spryest of them all. Admittedly, when Dad rises from his chair, he starts at kind of an angle. But by about the 10-yard line, he's straightened up and pushing his walker at top speed.

Heading to the chapel with them, my thoughts turn to gratitude for the medical advancements that got them this far—that, and not smoking—but I start to wonder if bacon is really so bad for you. (It's a slow walk, so why not think about bacon?) The South is legendary for its fatty foods, and yet here they are. Although maybe it was the Jell-O pudding.

It's no surprise that Sunday worship at a senior center usually focuses more on heaven than on earth. Some might feel that fire and brimstone is necessary when aiming at those in the midst of an enthusiastically misspent youth, but the elderly have come this far by faith (and cholesterol pills) and don't need to hear about changing their ways. Changing their hearing-aid batteries, maybe. And except for the occasional wheelchair fender-bender in the hallway (too many wheelchairs to pinpoint the guilty), it's hard for them to fall short of the glory of God, especially while napping.

SITTING IN A room listening to my parents' reminiscences—all of which I've heard before—is still a sublimely pleasant experience. Much better than the other times the three of us sat together in parent-teacher conferences waiting as the anxiety sweat accumulated on my forehead. And then the inevitable: "He has so much potential" [pause for effect] "but he's not applying himself."

Which is why Elizabeth Warren will never be president. When she talks, *that's* what she sounds like. And as most Americans will tell you, applying ourselves is just too time- consuming. "Dancing with the Stars" is not going to watch itself. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. *is art director of* Sojourners.

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